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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**CONSTITUENCY CONSTRAINTS ON VIOLENCE:
AL-QAEDA AND WMD**

by

William W. Browne III

December 2006

Thesis Advisor:

Thesis Co-Advisor:

Michael Freeman

James Russell

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The changing nature of terrorist attacks in the previous decade has cast doubt on the commonly accepted constraints on terrorist violence. Claims that these constraints are eroding has led to an unstudied assumption that modern terrorist groups, and al-Qaeda in particular, are not subject to constituency constraints. Most alarming is the possibility that al-Qaeda, allegedly unconcerned with alienating supporters, will attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yet no detailed study of al-Qaeda's constituency constraints has been undertaken, even though they devote considerable effort to win popular support among Muslims.

This thesis reveals that al-Qaeda seeks the support of a constituency as the central pillar of their strategy. This constituency, contrary to Western portrayals, largely does not support indiscriminate killing and would not support a WMD attack. Al-Qaeda is aware of this sentiment, and as a pragmatic group is willing to alter their methods to gain supporters. Consequently, al-Qaeda is not likely to conduct such an attack for fear of alienating this constituency.

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**CONSTITUENCY CONSTRAINTS ON VIOLENCE:
AL-QAEDA AND WMD**

William W. Browne III
Major, United States Air Force
B.A., University of Washington, 1993

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2006**

Author: William W. Browne III

Approved by: Michael Freeman
Thesis Advisor

James Russell
Thesis Co-Advisor

Douglas Porch
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The changing nature of terrorist attacks in the previous decade has cast doubt on the commonly accepted constraints on terrorist violence. Claims that these constraints are eroding has led to an unstudied assumption that modern terrorist groups, and al-Qaeda in particular, are not subject to constituency constraints. Most alarming is the possibility that al-Qaeda, allegedly unconcerned with alienating supporters, will attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yet no detailed study of al-Qaeda's constituency constraints has been undertaken, even though they devote considerable effort to win popular support among Muslims.

This thesis reveals that al-Qaeda seeks the support of a constituency as the central pillar of their strategy. This constituency, contrary to Western portrayals, largely does not support indiscriminate killing and would not support a WMD attack. Al-Qaeda is aware of this sentiment, and as a pragmatic group is willing to alter their methods to gain supporters. Consequently, al-Qaeda is not likely to conduct such an attack for fear of alienating this constituency.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. AL-QAEDA: UNCONSTRAINED?

Al-Qaeda has become popular culture's poster child of what has been termed the "new terrorism."¹ Al-Qaeda appears to share all of the necessary characteristics of this new breed: religious, if not apocalyptic goals; the willingness to inflict mass casualties; and a transnational, networked organization. The obvious corollary of these characteristics is that al-Qaeda is free from past constraints on violence, is seeking to acquire and willing to use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and has the organization required to execute a devastating attack using these weapons.

The academic generalizations and political rhetoric about terrorism and the WMD threat have overlooked an important fact regarding al-Qaeda's operations: their careful and long-standing efforts to legitimize their actions to the wider Muslim community.² These efforts seem to indicate that al-Qaeda seeks some level of approval and support from a constituency -- in this case some portion of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims. This fact stands in stark contrast to the implicit suggestion that al-Qaeda has no constituency to satisfy and is therefore free from constraints in carrying out attacks. If al-Qaeda seeks the support of a constituency, are they constrained from using WMD for fear of losing popular support?

¹ "New terrorism" is the commonly accepted phrase to represent the characteristics of modern terrorism first described by Bruce Hoffman in *Terrorist Targeting: Tactics, Trends, and Potentialities* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1992).

² Jonathan B. Tucker and Amy Sands, "An Unlikely Threat." *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (July/August 1999): 46-52. Tucker and Sands note that in the late 1990s, President Clinton and Defense Secretary Cohen both emphasized the threats from unconventional weapons in the hands of terrorists. Two books from this same period conclude that the threat of WMD terrorism is growing, but they do not empirically examine any particular group. Walter Lacquer, *The New Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), emphasizes both the proliferation of capabilities and terrorist groups as reasons for concern. Richard Falkenrath, Robert Newman, and Bradley Thayer, *America's Achilles Heel* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), acknowledge the scarcity of groups that appear willing to use WMD, but argue that the high consequences of a WMD attack merit increased attention to the threat.

B. PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

The answer to this question should not, by itself, determine the extent to which the United States prepares for a terrorist attack utilizing WMD. Aum Shrinrikyo has already demonstrated that some groups are prepared to use WMD on a massive scale; prudence dictates at least a minimal effort be made to prevent it. Likewise, advocates of the new terrorism paradigm may be correct in raising the alarm about the disturbing characteristics of some terrorist attacks that emerged in the last several decades. However, caution must be used to avoid an uncritical association of all new terrorism characteristics with a particular terrorist group. The new terrorism paradigm is a conglomeration of characteristics; no group will be associated with all of them. Ignoring the specifics of a particular group can result in generic policy that ignores important factors impacting a group's ability to carry out violence. For al-Qaeda in particular, understanding the factors that may constrain their decision to use WMD may lead to a better informed counterterrorism policy.³ If al-Qaeda is constrained from using WMD by the sentiments of a constituency, the United States should carefully consider how its policies affect this population.

C. THE CONSTRAINTS ON TERRORIST VIOLENCE

The understanding of terrorist group restraint was best summarized by Brian Jenkins. In "The Limits of Terror: Constraints on the Escalation of Violence," Jenkins best summed up these limits in the oft repeated phrase, "Terrorists want many witnesses, not many dead."⁴ Jenkins asserted that in addition to the logistical limits of attaining truly catastrophic weapons, terrorists

³ John Parachini, "Putting WMD Terrorism into Perspective." *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 42. Parachini frames the general policy implications from a failure to understand the restraints and disincentives a group has to employing WMD.

⁴ Brian Jenkins, "The Limits of Terror: Constraints on the Escalation of Violence," *Harvard International Review* 17 (Summer 1995): 46. In this article Jenkins restates this popular phrase, which he first coined in 1974. Some version of this quote surfaces countless times in terrorism literature. This theme of constrained intent appears in Ehud Sprinzak, "The Great Superterrorism Scare," *Foreign Policy* 112 (Autumn 1998): 113; Tucker and Sands p. 47; David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism and Weapons of the Apocalypse," *National Security Studies Quarterly* (Summer 1999): 49; Michael L. Moodie, "The Chemical Weapons Threat," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer (Connecticut: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003), 198; and David Tucker, "What's New About the New Terrorism and how Dangerous is it?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13 (Autumn 2001): 6.

are constrained by a variety of non-logistical factors. Limits on terrorist's intentions include organizational, political, and social factors that constrain groups from escalating violence beyond an acceptable level. From an organizational standpoint, groups may fear splintering as a result of disagreements over conducting attacks resulting in mass casualties. The political landscape may limit escalation in that most groups want only to change the system, but may potentially destroy it through their actions. Finally, social limitations can occur when terrorist groups fear that escalating attacks may alienate their support base and result in lost sympathy for their cause.⁵

Three terrorist events in the 1990s began to shift the thinking about the relevance of these limitations. The 1993 attack on the World Trade Center and the 1995 attack on the Oklahoma City federal building illustrated the willingness of some terrorists to inflict mass casualties. Although the World Trade Center attack resulted in few casualties, the investigation revealed that the perpetrators intended to collapse one tower onto the other, with the potential for casualties well beyond any previous attack.⁶ The Oklahoma City attack made mass casualty terrorism on U.S. soil a reality. Finally, the 1995 Aum Shrinrikyo sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system brought to the forefront fears of WMD attacks, as well as the danger of religious motives.

These attacks spawned a new debate about the nature of modern terrorism, not because of the actual destruction inflicted, but because some of the conventional wisdom about the constraints on terrorist violence appeared to be violated. These attacks gave rise to both doomsday rhetoric from policy makers and an increased academic critique of the previous notions on the limits to terrorist violence. The use of WMD, the apparent willingness to cause mass casualties, and the religious motivations of the perpetrators were all cited as harbingers of the terrorism to come. Instead of appealing to a political

⁵ Jenkins, *Limits of Terror*, 46.

⁶ Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism and WMD: Some Preliminary Hypothesis," *The Nonproliferation Review* (Spring/Summer 1997): 50.

constituency, new terrorists seek only to satisfy God.⁷ Bruce Hoffman summarized this view: “new adversaries, new motivations, and new rationales have emerged in the recent years to challenge at least some of the conventional wisdom on both terrorists and terrorism.”⁸ Hoffman argued that the conventional wisdom was conceived “decades ago” under different circumstances. He also believed that the old ideas were most wrong when it came to WMDs.⁹ The restraints on both capability and intentions were eroding, and “the particular characteristics, justifications and mindsets of religious and quasi-religious – as compared with secular – terrorists suggest that religious terrorists will be among the most likely of potential categories of non-state perpetrators to use WMD.”¹⁰

The proposal that there was now a “new terrorism” did not go unchallenged. Sprinzak and Rapoport took to task the claim that the new groups had managed to shed the constraints of violence, and noted the continued existence of considerable limits on both terrorists’ capability and intentions.¹¹ They did, however, open the door a little more in response to the difficulty in gauging religiously motivated groups. The organizational, political, and social constraints were noted, but usually with a degree of uncertainty about the efficacy of these factors in controlling violence.¹²

After the attacks of September 11, politicians clearly had no incentive to discuss the possibility of terrorism having social constraints. Al-Qaeda’s willingness to inflict mass casualties, its reported efforts to attain WMD, and its stated intention to use them were enough to convince most politicians and many

⁷ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 196; Paul R. Pillar, “The Dimensions of Terrorism and Counterterrorism,” in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer, 30 (Connecticut: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003); David Kay, “WMD Terrorism: Hype or Reality,” in *The Terrorism Threat and U.S. Government Response: Operational and Organizational Factors*, ed. James M. Smith and William C. Thomas (Colorado: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, 2001), 73; Steve Simon and Daniel Benjamin, “America and the New Terrorism,” *Survival* 42 (Spring 2000): 59.

⁸ Hoffman *Inside Terrorism*, 196.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 197.

¹¹ Rapoport, 51; Sprinzak, 113-114.

¹² Moodie, 198; Tucker, 6-7; Pillar, 30-32.

academics of the possibility, if not probability, of a future WMD attack. Arguing that the nature of terrorism had indeed changed, Russell Howard echoed Bruce Hoffman's view that there was "nostalgia" for the "old terrorism."¹³ Yet some academic debate still questions the likelihood of a WMD attack taking place. John Gearson illustrates that the supposed move towards mass-casualty terrorism is statistically questionable, and that attacks have remained purposeful.¹⁴ Adam Dolnik notes that most groups develop significant constituencies and conduct their terror campaigns with clear strategic calculations. He also notes that the more popular a group becomes, the more support it attracts, and thus traditional restraints become a greater factor.¹⁵

D. QUESTIONS

Missing from this academic debate is any detailed study of al-Qaeda as it relates to the traditional limits on terrorist violence. While recent Naval Postgraduate theses have critically examined the claim that al-Qaeda is a "new terrorist" group, they leave unanswered the question of constituency restraints.¹⁶ Al-Qaeda's stated intentions to acquire and use WMD are alarming, yet their attempts to appeal to a larger audience raise questions about the social limits under which it may operate. This thesis will examine evidence that suggests al-Qaeda is subject to constituency constraints on violence, and to what extent the nature of these constraints could impact al-Qaeda's decision to conduct a large-

¹³ Russell D. Howard, "Understanding Al Qaeda's Application of the New Terrorism – The Key to Victory in the Current Campaign." in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer (Connecticut: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003), 75.

¹⁴ John Gearson, "The Nature of Modern Terrorism," In *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 20.

¹⁵ Adam Dolnik, "All God's Poisons: Re-Evaluating the Threat of Religious Terrorism with Respect to Non-Conventional Weapons," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Revised and Updated), ed. Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer (Connecticut: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 176.

¹⁶ Edwin O. Rueda, "New Terrorism? A Case Study of Al-Qaida and the Lebanese Hezbollah" (masters thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2001); Kleanthis Kyriakidis, "21st Century Terrorism: Wrong Diagnosis, Inadequate Remedy" (masters thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005). Rueda's thesis attempts to debunk al-Qaeda as a "new terrorist" group, but explicitly leaves the question of constituency restraint on WMD use open; see p. 54. Kyriakidis claims al-Qaeda is more likely to use WMD as a "Sampson option" because it has been under attack from all sides since 9/11, but does not examine constituent constraints; see p. 40.

scale attack with WMD. My hypothesis is that in seeking the support and approval of a Muslim base al-Qaeda is constrained from using WMD because they fear losing popular support.

E. ASSUMPTIONS

1. Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Discussions about the use of WMD often fail to discriminate between conventional attacks along the lines of what occurred on September 11, small scale WMD events like the Washington D.C. anthrax incidents, and a true large scale, city-destroying attack. Attacks using conventional means, having demonstrated their effectiveness, will continue to occur for the foreseeable future. But the stigma associated with the “WMD” label has made distinguishing between large and small scale attacks difficult. For the purpose of this argument, small scale or poorly executed attacks are excluded from the WMD category. While they may be important from a psychological standpoint, these attacks are not likely to have any greater material impact than September 11. What is in need of consideration is the possibility of a truly large, professionally planned and executed attack utilizing WMD that results in the destruction of the larger part of a city and its inhabitants.

A meaningful threshold for damage, from a comparative standpoint, is the damage resulting from the September 11 attacks. While those attacks fall on the low end of what a successful WMD attack might achieve, they are useful as a starting point for a number of reasons.¹⁷ First, the scale of destruction on September 11 is a reasonable example of what would occur in a successful but small scale WMD attack. The attacks targeted civilians and the physical damage was extensive.

Second, using September 11 as a comparative point is useful because we can analyze the reactions caused by this violence and extrapolate conclusions

¹⁷ Nadine Gurr and Benjamin Cole, *The New Face of Terrorism* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 80-82. The authors summarize potential casualties from successful WMD attacks; chemical attacks have the lowest potential deaths, from several hundred to several thousand. Successful attacks using biological and nuclear weapons would likely result in at least tens of thousands. Thus, the September 11 attacks represent the low end of expectations for the type of attack considered here.

from it. In other words, if reaction within the Muslim world to September 11 has caused al-Qaeda to restrain itself, then we can expect similar effects from larger attacks. The inaccuracies of this approach do not exaggerate any conclusions, but serve to downplay them – because September 11 did not involve WMD and thus was free from the associated stigma (while still violating norms against killing civilians and the illegitimate use of violence). The stigma associated with WMD should produce greater negative reactions. Thus using reactions to conventional violence is a useful basis upon which to build conclusions about al-Qaeda's future decisions to use WMD. This indirect approach supposing future reactions to a WMD attack from conventional violence is used throughout this thesis.

2. Al-Qaeda as a Functioning Hierarchy

This thesis examines if a constituency would influence al-Qaeda's decision to conduct a WMD attack in the United States. Implicit in this examination is the assumption that al-Qaeda still exists with some form of hierarchical command structure able to make and communicate strategic decisions. This assumption is not without considerable challenges itself. There is no question that the U.S. effort to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan and eliminate al-Qaeda as an effective organization has had a devastating impact on both, but the degree of this impact is a matter of debate. The attacks on trains and subways in Madrid and London indicate that local terror groups may be carrying out attacks without explicit orders or authorization from any central al-Qaeda leadership. The potential links that have emerged are unclear and fail to conclusively indicate decisions are being made and communicated from top al-Qaeda leaders.¹⁸ Conversely, al-Qaeda's number two man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, reportedly called off a New York City subway attack involving chemical weapons, indicating a degree of tactical control and strategic decision making.¹⁹ Senior al-

¹⁸ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*. (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2004): 272. Mohammed Khan and Carlota Gall, "Accounts After 2005 London Bombings Point to Al Qaeda Role From Pakistan," *The New York Times*, 13 August 2006, 1.6. Keith Johnson, "Arrests in Spain Offer New Insight On Terrorists' Ties," *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 October 2004, A16.

¹⁹ Al Baker and William K. Rashbaum, "U.S. Feared Cyanide Attack On Subway," *The New York Times*, 18 June 2006, 1.25.

Qaeda correspondence to Abu Musab al Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, indicates they still attempt to wield control over overall strategic decision making.²⁰

By limiting the discussion to consider only large scale WMD attacks, the debate about al-Qaeda's hierarchical control can be minimized because to conduct such an attack, al-Qaeda must possess some degree of hierarchical organization. John Parchini states that, "Achieving catastrophic outcomes with unconventional weapons requires a considerable scale of operations."²¹ Victor Asal and Gary Acherman wrote:

In order for a group to embark upon a concerted CBRN program, it would arguably need to devote substantial resources to the acquisition, production, and in some cases testing of their weapon...any CBRN activities would need to be supported by an efficient logistical backbone, including the ability to transport personnel and weapons unmolested as well as a robust communications capability.²²

A hierarchical structure is necessary to organize such a complex effort, even if the hierarchy is very flat. If no such organization exists to make the decision to employ unconventional weapons, it will also be insufficient to organize and conduct an effective large scale WMD attack. If very little control exists, then capability to organize and conduct WMD attack is diminished. If a hierarchical organization is required to present this threat, then the assumption that this organization exists is required if the threat is to be taken as a potentiality.

²⁰ The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point published two letters captured in Iraq from senior al-Qaeda leadership. The first, published online October 11, 2005 is from al-Qaeda's number two man, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The second letter, which amplifies and confirms the first, is from a previously unknown al-Qaeda leader 'Atiyha. The CTC assesses 'Atiyah to be a "highly placed al-Qa'ida leader who fought in Algeria in the early 1990s." This letter was discovered shortly after Zarqawi was killed in June 2006. These letters will subsequently be referenced as the 'Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi,' and the 'Atiyah, letter to Zarqawi.' Both letters are available online at <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony.asp>.

²¹ Parchini, 44.

²² Victor Asal and Gary A. Ackerman, "Terrorist Organizational Factors and the Pursuit and Use of CBRN Terrorism" (paper presented at the International Studies Association meeting, San Diego, March 2006), 5-6.

F. METHODOLOGY

This thesis will be a single case study of al-Qaeda and its constituency. The case study will be structured into three parts. The first part will examine evidence suggesting al-Qaeda actively seeks to gain approval from a constituency. The second part will attempt to establish to what extent this constituency accepts or rejects both the message and the violence carried out by al-Qaeda. Two categories of the constituent group will be sampled: radical Islamic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and the Muslim public in general. The final part will search for evidence that al-Qaeda is willing to be pragmatic to reach its goals, whether they are aware of negative public sentiment, and if they have constrained their violence in reaction to this sentiment.

1. Establishing a Constituency

The first step in determining if al-Qaeda is constrained by a constituency is determining if al-Qaeda seeks support outside of their organization. This first question will be answered by examining the strategic thought of al-Qaeda, a task made simpler by al-Qaeda strategists themselves. Numerous works have been published detailing how al-Qaeda's leadership intends to achieve its strategic goals. The works of three authors in particular will be examined. These are Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* published in December 2001; Abu Bakr Naji's *The Management of Barbarism* published in 2004; and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria*.

2. Measuring Constituent Sentiment

The potential audience of al-Qaeda will be examined by looking at groups one might expect to support their violence and the sentiments of Muslims in general towards terror, Osama bin Laden, and the U.S. In the first case, the reactions of groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah to al-Qaeda's violence will be examined, as well as jihadis themselves. In the second case, polling conducted by Zogby International and the Pew Global Attitudes Project will be examined for both direct and indirect evidence of Muslim support or rejection of al-Qaeda violence.

3. Evidence of Constraints

No conclusions showing that al-Qaeda is constrained can be made without providing evidence that al-Qaeda is sensitive to sentiments revealed in the previous section and is willing to change their tactics to account for these sentiments. Both direct and indirect evidence of constraint will be examined. Direct evidence includes changes in behavior and statements by al-Qaeda's strategists necessitating certain limits to their violence. Indirect evidence includes al-Qaeda communications that illustrate awareness that they are violating norms of behavior.

G. CHAPTER ROAD MAP

This thesis will be organized into three chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. The chapters mirror the methodology identified above. Chapter II will examine how al-Qaeda's goals and strategy indicate that it seeks a wide constituency, and how this constituency may limit al-Qaeda's violence. Chapter III will describe how this constituency accepts or rejects al-Qaeda and the violence it conducts. Chapter four will analyze if and how al-Qaeda has reacted to the Muslim response to both its message and methods. The reactions will be used to illustrate the mutual recognition of norms by al-Qaeda and its constituency, and whether these norms indicate that it is unacceptable for al-Qaeda to use WMD. The concluding chapter will summarize findings from the previous chapters and place them within al-Qaeda's strategic calculus to answer the original question: Will al-Qaeda be constrained from using WMD by their constituency? Finally, broad policy implications for the United States will be briefly discussed.

II. AL-QAEDA'S SEARCH FOR POPULAR SUPPORT

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will establish that al-Qaeda's overall strategy is driven by its attempts to appeal to a constituency. This strategy is the result of lessons learned from past failures to mobilize widespread Muslim support for jihadi movements. The strategy has now evolved to place a premium on winning the hearts and minds of Muslims. It is the primary reason the United States was targeted for attack; Zawahiri believed their attacks against a nation that is widely disliked in the Muslim world would result in a groundswell of support and action. But the dependence on public support also requires pragmatism by terrorist groups. One of the titles examined here, *The Management of Barbarism*, is an implicit acknowledgement that violence is not only a tool to influence public opinion, but that violence must be controlled and limited by public opinion. By relying on the Muslim public as their primary means to achieve victory, al-Qaeda is subject to constituency constraints on the violence they perpetrate.

B. ESTABLISHING THE CONSTITUENCY

The primary reason al-Qaeda turned from targeting the “near enemy” (apostate Muslim governments) to the “far enemy” (the United States) was to gain support from and mobilize the Muslim masses. The turn to the far enemy was not based on a strategic expectation that attacks by themselves would ever be able to defeat the sole remaining superpower. The shift was the result of a pragmatic examination of past failed jihadi campaigns. This examination revealed to radical strategists that a large degree of the past defeats were due to the failure of jihadi organizations to gain the support of the population, and this lack of support made victory against their enemies impossible. As the magnitude of these failures has become clearer, jihadi strategists have come to embrace the battle for public support and sympathy as equal to, if not greater than, the physical battle against the enemies of Islamic fundamentalists. The effects of this strategic thinking are evident in many ways. Jihadis are preoccupied with the media and frame themselves as a historical Muslim vanguard. They hijack

hot-button issues of the Muslim community for self-promotion, and use specifically Islamic justifications to legitimize their violence. Thus, the strategic thought and actions of radical jihadists confirm the existence of a “terror constituency” that is viewed as critical to the success of their struggle.

1. Old Failures, New Strategy

The past failure of jihadi movements to gain support of the masses is a consistent theme in the writings of jihadi strategists. Works translated from three authors in particular illustrate the realization that the neglect of a credible public relations campaign doomed the efforts of radical groups by failing to gain a minimum level of support. The regular appearance of this theme is critical in establishing that jihadis depend on gaining popular support: it demonstrates in their own words an understanding that the success of their efforts are dependent on the support of others - they cannot win a contest against governments alone. Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Knight's Under the Prophet's Banner* clearly states that this is the reason behind al-Qaeda's decision to target the “far enemy,” because that is something that he expects the Muslim masses to support.²³

Zawahiri said that one of the lessons learned from his confrontation with the Egyptian regime over three decades is that the jihadist movement cannot isolate itself from the ummah (the Muslim community worldwide) and turn into an elite pitted against authority. The jihadist vanguard, he said, must be fully integrated into Muslim society's social fabric and must be attentive to its aspirations and concerns. The implication is that jihadis lost the struggle against the near enemy because they had isolated themselves from the ummah and failed to mobilize it.²⁴

The critique of these failures appears in three pieces of jihadi literature recently translated. The first of these pieces is *The Management of Barbarism*, a work by Abu Bakr Naji published in 2004. Naji is described as “a rising star in the jihadi movement.”²⁵ Like Zawahiri (whose own writings are discussed later), Naji notes the failure of past jihadi groups to take the initiative in explaining their

²³ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25-26.

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁵ Jarret M. Brachman and William F. McCants, “Stealing Al-Qai’da’s Playbook,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (forthcoming), <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai'da's%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf>, 8-9. (accessed October 2006).

violence. This allowed governments to gain the upper hand in the ideological battle and led to the eventual defeat of the movement in Egypt.²⁶

A similar and more detailed critique of failed jihadi efforts appears in Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's *Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria*. Brachman and McCants describe Suri as a "senior al-Qa'ida ideologue," who has "written his way into the intellectual heart of today's jihadi-Salafi movement."²⁷ Suri plainly states what it takes be a successful revolutionary movement:

The revolutionary uprising starts always with a small group of people who happen to be intent, determined, faithful and willing to sacrifice for the sake of the cause, if those revolutionary vanguards are able to present, and communicate their vision, demands and ambitions in a clear and concise manner...then people will begin to rally around them....No matter how big or capable the vanguard organization is; the war is waged on behalf of the masses, those masses are its source of information, supplies, personnel, and refuge....All revolutionary wars that were able to mobilize the masses on their behalf were successful.²⁸

But in Suri's evaluation, the jihadis in Syria fell far short of their efforts to rally the people. The failure to communicate their message to the population led to a lack of understanding and support among the masses.²⁹ This lack of popular support resulted in the defeat of the Syrian jihad.³⁰

Between Zawahiri's 2001 *Knight's Under the Prophet's Banner* and his captured letter to Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's number two man displays a remarkable sensitivity to the importance of winning public opinion. Having experienced first-hand the consequences of jihadi's failure in Egypt, Zawahiri places the blame for their defeat squarely on the lack of popular support. Zawahiri reveals his strategic realization that failure "to mobilize the masses in the effort to overthrow

²⁶ Brachman and McCants, 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria*. This citation references document AFGP-2002- 600080 Chap 2 (Actually appearing as the 3rd chapter. 2nd page of chapter 2, under "2nd. Recruitment, mobilization, and indoctrination." The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point Harmony database documents are available on line at http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony_docs.asp. (October 2006).

²⁹ Al-Suri.

³⁰ Brachman and McCants, 17.

their corrupt rulers” resulted in the general defeat of local jihadi movements in the 1990’s.³¹ This acknowledgement of the necessity for gaining support is also evident in his thoughts on the Iraqi jihadi movement. In a warning not to repeat the mistakes of the past, Zawahiri counsels al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Zarqawi that “in the absence of public support, the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows.”³² It is also significant that recent intercepted communications in Iraq indicate that the jihadi insurgency is “vexed by the continued loss of popular support.”³³

Zawahiri’s analysis of past failures has led to an acknowledgement of the importance of public opinion in the success of al-Qaeda’s efforts. As the Muslim vanguard, Zawahiri believes they “must make sure to mobilize the widest support base possible, and not to confront government authority alone.”³⁴ Thus, the success of al-Qaeda depends on the support of the masses.³⁵ These thoughts are echoed again in Zawahiri’s letter to Zarqawi: jihadis cannot achieve their goals if they are “cut off from public support.”³⁶

Most revealing in Zawahiri’s writing is the primacy of the effort to gain public support in forming strategy. Zawahiri reveals that al-Qaeda didn’t develop its strategy against the far enemy and then seek support for it; it developed the strategy as a direct result of an effort to appeal to and gain the support from the Muslim masses. The primary reason for the emergence of al-Qaeda as a global threat to the U.S. is an attempt to enlist as many of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims in the jihadi movement as possible. Fawaz Gerges details this thought process:

³¹ Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-2.

³² Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

³³ Al-Qa’ida in Iraq Hampered by Bureaucracy and Loss of Sunni Support, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 20 April 2006. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/CTC%20-%20Zarqawi%20Letters%20Analysis.pdf> (accessed October 2006).

³⁴ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 96.

³⁵ Schmuel Bar and Yair Minzili, “The Zawahiri Letter and the Strategy of al-Qaeda,” *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology* 3 (February 16, 2006): 41.

³⁶ Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

...Zawahiri offers an alternative solution: taking the war global against Islam's enemies. He says that the slogan understood by the ummah and to which it responds is waging jihad against Israel and the American military presence in the region: "The jihadist movement finally assumed leadership of the ummah after it adopted the slogan of liberating the ummah of its foreign enemies and portrayed it as a battle between Islam and kufr [impiety] and kufar [infidels]."³⁷

Zawahiri recognized that they needed a compelling reason for the masses to accept al-Qaeda as their vanguard. They attempted to find this motivation by tapping into the "anxiety and humiliation" that many Muslims feel.³⁸ Zawahiri's strategic thoughts, revealed through his own words, show that al-Qaeda constituted itself as a means to mobilize the Muslim masses. In other words, al-Qaeda does not exist to win the battle alone for the benefit of all Muslims; al-Qaeda exists to mobilize the Muslim masses to win the war that al-Qaeda cannot.

2. The Primacy of the Public Relations Effort

Though al-Qaeda has managed to conduct spectacular attacks, the apparently greater degree of carnage and destruction sought does not mean jihadists believe the attacks will, by themselves, bring them victory. Al-Qaeda conducts violence to gain public support from its constituency. Gilles Kepel's *The War for Muslim Minds* states this point: "...terrorism on Western territory would not distract them from their primary task: waging a war for the hearts and minds of Muslims. Al-Qaeda's long-term strategy was to strengthen its grip on co-religionists and to enlist them in establishing an 'Islamic state' through armed struggle."³⁹ The central role of the ummah to al-Qaeda's strategy has placed the public relations effort at the forefront. The primacy of the public relations effort is a theme repeated by all three jihadi authors previously discussed.

In *The Management of Barbarism*, Naji bases his grand strategy on creating an overwhelming propaganda victory through baiting the U.S. to invade

³⁷ Gerges, 25-26.

³⁸ Ibid, 138-139.

³⁹ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 2.

the Middle East. Naji does not concentrate on the physical damage attacks may do, but on creating a situation that jihadis can exploit to inflame and mobilize the masses:

This will result in a great propaganda victory for the jihadis because the people will 1) be impressed that the jihadis are directly fighting a superpower, 2) be outraged over the invasion of a foreign power, 3) be disabused of the notion that the superpower is invincible the longer the war goes on, and, 4) be angry at the proxy governments allied with the invading superpower.⁴⁰

Suri also gives propaganda a major role in his vision of a successful jihad. Suri believes the propagandists “will play a pivotal role” by “pursuing aggressive media campaigns and using technology like satellite television and the Internet to communicate the movement’s objectives and justify its use of violence to the public.”⁴¹

Zawahiri’s *Knight’s Under the Prophet’s Banner* also clearly places the propaganda effort at the forefront. Zawahiri’s writings to this effect are framed by the consequences of failed efforts – a result of his experience in Egypt. Zawahiri believes their attacks must “take on exemplary value and be easily decipherable by targeted populations capable of identifying with them.”⁴² If attacks are not conducted with a proper consideration of the public reaction, “the Muslim vanguard runs the risk of general indifference at the killing of its members, and of fighting a battle in which it confronts government authority alone.”⁴³

Two key pieces of internal al-Qaeda correspondence, captured in Iraq, confirm that al-Qaeda’s leadership continues to be extremely concerned about the impact of their violence on the public relations effort. In a letter captured in October 2005, Zawahiri reminds al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi that the support of the Muslim population in the region is the most powerful weapon that he enjoys, then warns him to pursue both political and military action

⁴⁰ Brachman and McCants, 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

⁴² Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 98.

⁴³ Ibid.

side by side: “I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”⁴⁴ In the windfall of intelligence material gathered at the scene of Zarqawi’s death in June 2006, a similar letter was found both confirming the authenticity of the Zawahiri’s letter and echoing its sentiments.⁴⁵ The letter expresses concern with Zarqawi’s “failure to understand al-Qa’ida’s broader strategic objective: attracting mass support among the wider Sunni Muslim community.”⁴⁶ It also “reminds Zarqawi that military actions must be subservient to al-Qa’ida’s long-term political goals.”⁴⁷ These letters verify that the leadership of al-Qaeda is still very concerned about the impact its violence has on the Muslim community. It also demonstrates the degree to which a diminished organization is attempting to exert its control of tactical operations for strategic considerations.

These letters, and the writings of the three strategists already discussed confirm that senior leaders have reached a consensus on the necessity of winning the sentiments and support of the Muslim population. This strain of thought is evident in the deluge of internet, audio, and video messages released by bin Laden and Zawahiri. There are far more media “events” than actual attacks, illustrating a measure of preoccupation with propaganda. In fact, fellow jihadis and Taliban were critical of bin Laden for his “obsession” with the media. Gerges notes that senior members of both groups expressed protest and alarm at bin Laden’s infatuation with his public image. They felt he “was prepared to sacrifice Afghanistan and Mullah Omar at the altar of his public relations campaign.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

⁴⁵ *Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa’ida High Command*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 25 September 29, 2006. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/CTC-AtiyahLetter.pdf>. (accessed October 2006).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gerges, 197.

C. CONCLUSION

The writings of senior jihadi strategists refute any possibility that al-Qaeda is committing terror acts solely for terror's sake. Al-Qaeda is in the midst of a global strategy to mobilize support from the Muslim ummah. Al-Qaeda places the public relations effort at the center of their strategy to achieve this goal. This strategy was arrived at after a careful examination of past jihadi failures to nationalist governments. This examination revealed that the defeats were primarily due to the failure to garner support among the population at large. Targeting the U.S. was viewed as a possible method to unite the Muslim public behind al-Qaeda. This shift in strategy was not accompanied by any expectation of outright military victory, but was fundamentally an effort to mobilize mass support against a common enemy; mobilization of the masses is the central theme of al-Qaeda's strategy. Recent correspondence between key al-Qaeda members confirms that this strategy remains as important now as ever. Al-Qaeda does not believe it can succeed without Muslim support.

III. THE CONSTITUENCY

A. INTRODUCTION

Muslim opinion matters because al-Qaeda cares about their acceptance within the greater Muslim community. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, mobilizing the ummah is central to this strategy – for al-Qaeda, success or failure lies with Muslim sentiment. This chapter examines Muslim sentiments toward al-Qaeda in two ways. First, the jihadi and fundamentalist response post September 11 is examined to ascertain how these groups - who would be expected to have sympathies with al-Qaeda - responded to al-Qaeda's attacks. Second, public opinion survey from Zogby International and the Pew Research Center are used to analyze if al-Qaeda enjoys widespread support and if indiscriminate attacks against civilians might be widely tolerated. Before examining these two facets of Muslim opinion, the context in which Muslims judge violence must be discussed.

B. CONTEXT: LEGITIMATE VIOLENCE IN ISLAM

From its earliest days, Islam has contended with the same problems of warfare that have confronted Western civilization. Justifying both the causes of and methods in war have consumed scholars and theologians for centuries. Islam's treatment of these subjects date back to the prophet Mohammed's earliest days and have gone through many different revisions and interpretations as the history of the Muslim world unfolded. The justifications used by al-Qaeda are important because they attempt to establish legitimacy for action within an Islamic context; that is, they attempt to justify their actions through religious interpretation. Al-Qaeda's interpretations represent an extreme development of this evolving body of thought. While their arguments are constructed within an Islamic framework, the format is similar to Western traditions: justifications for going to war, and justifications for methods in war.

In the most general sense, terrorism is no more accepted within Islamic culture as they are within Western culture:

Irregular warfare and terrorism, as those terms are commonly understood, are almost uniformly condemned in Islamic literature, both classical and contemporary. Yet both seem to figure highly in contemporary developments in the Islamic world.⁴⁹

Tamara Son brings up a critical point: why does terrorism appear to be a fixture of the Muslim world? It is essential to understand that, just as Western terrorist groups developed their own twisted justifications for violence, so have Islamic groups. But just as in the West, Muslims do not generally accept extremist justification without question; they are weighed for their merit in relation to the established traditions of Islam. Just as Western groups express their justifications through ideas associated with Western development, Islamic groups justify their violence in an Islamic context.

1. Legitimate War: Defensive Jihad

Osama bin-Laden has been very clear in making a case for attacks against the West: Islam and Muslims are under attack from the West, thus Muslims are compelled to engage in a defensive jihad. The concept of jihad takes on many meaning within Islam, and the specific type of jihad called for matters in determining the degree of legitimacy. In other words, some forms and interpretations of jihad are more accepted than others.

Jihad is a complicated concept with a rich history and no agreed upon definition. John Esposito writes that

If you were watching a television special on jihad, with four Muslim speakers, you might well hear four different responses to the question: ‘What is jihad?’ One might say that jihad is striving to lead a good Muslim life, praying and fasting regularly, being an attentive spouse and parent. Another might identify jihad as working hard to spread the message of Islam. For a third, it might be supporting the struggle of oppressed Muslim peoples in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, or Kosovo. And for the final

⁴⁹ Tamara Son, “Irregular Warfare and Terrorism in Islam: Asking the Right Questions,” in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, eds. James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 129.

speaker, as for Osama bin Laden, jihad could mean working to overthrow governments in the Muslim world and attacking America.⁵⁰

Bin Laden's declaration of jihad, first published in October 1996, calls on Muslims to engage in a defensive jihad.⁵¹ By calling for a defensive jihad, bin Laden relies on the earliest authorization for violence in the Koran, stemming from the time when Mohammed and his community in Medina came under attack.⁵² The legitimacy of violent action in defense of the Muslim community is a generally accepted concept. Thus, if bin Laden's argument that the West is attacking Islam is considered credible, then engaging in violence against the West in a defensive jihad is not only permissible, but compelled.⁵³

Bin Laden presents what can be, through many Muslim's eyes, a credible argument that Islam is under attack from the West. In his *Declaration of Jihad*, he presents a laundry list of grievances:

It is no secret to you, my brothers, that the people of Islam have been afflicted with oppression, hostility, and injustice by the Judeo-Christian alliance and its supporters. This shows our enemies' belief that Muslim blood is the cheapest and that their property and wealth merely loot. Your blood has been spilt in Palestine and Iraq, and the horrific image of the massacre in Qana in Lebanon are still fresh in people's minds. The massacres that have taken place in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Fatani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, and Bosnia-Herzegovina send shivers down our spines and stirrup our passions. All this has happened before the eyes and ears of the world, but the blatant imperial arrogance of America, under the cover of the immoral United Nations, has prevented the dispossessed from arming themselves.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

⁵¹ Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, Bruce Lawrence, ed., translated by James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), 23.

⁵² Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, "The Development of Jihad in Islamic Revelation and History," in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 39.

⁵³ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002), 146. The compellence of defensive jihad was emphasized by Osama bin Laden's mentor, Abdallah Azzam, during the Afghan war against the Soviets.

⁵⁴ Bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, 25.

Esposito notes that “many Muslims today believe that the conditions of their world require a jihad.”⁵⁵ The weakness of Muslim governments and economies in relation to the West, the predominance of Western culture, and Western complicity in supporting oppressive regimes create a desire to restore “Muslim power” through a “return to Islam.”⁵⁶ Thus, bin Laden’s call for a defensive jihad at least holds an attraction in its idea, and resonates with Muslims who are displeased with the current state of affairs in the Muslim world. The logical extension is that for many Muslims, justification for violence appears, at a minimum, plausible. However, the manifestation of this defensive jihad is questionable, because “instead of being defensive, the global jihad operates offensively outside the area which would normally be construed as the theater of war in which the legitimate defense of Islamic lands against outside aggression would occur (for example, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan).”⁵⁷ Attacking civilians in their homeland does not match the common conception of a defensive jihad. So that while Muslims may be sympathetic towards the view that Islam is under attack by the West, the nature of al-Qaeda’s actions are difficult to support in the tradition of a defensive jihad.

2. Proportionality and Discrimination

Just war theory as it pertains to the practice of war is defined by two principles: proportionality and discrimination.⁵⁸ While “one should not force a comparison between the Islamic and Western traditions,” each shows a “moral concern that the just and the unjust not be equally subject to the damage of war.”⁵⁹ Plainly put, each tradition has sought to clarify who may be attacked in war and what methods are permissible. In this case, al-Qaeda has a difficult task

⁵⁵ Esposito, 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Richard Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 362.

⁵⁸ Stephen E. Lammers, “Approaches to Limits on War in Western Just War Discourse,” in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 57.

⁵⁹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Ahkam Al-Bughat: Irregular Warfare and the Law of Rebellion in Islam,” in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 149.

in satisfying Islamic criteria for both discrimination and proportionality. In fact, al Qaeda simply rejects the classic “regulations regarding the goals and means of valid jihad (that violence must be proportional and that only the necessary amount of force should be used to repel the enemy), that innocent civilians should not be targeted, and that jihad must be declared by the ruler or head of state.”⁶⁰ Since no classic justification for al-Qaeda’s mass killing of civilians exist, they rely on their own questionable interpretations. Bin Laden’s letter to Americans contains an exhaustive list of grievances which can be condensed into the following logic. First, as Muslims have been killed by the millions, it is just for Muslims to kill Americans by the millions. Second, since the U.S. is a democracy, the people are responsible for their government, and thus may be targeted.⁶¹ Essentially the argument is based on reciprocity and distributed responsibility.

Bin Laden’s explanations are aided by how Islam categorizes who may be killed. Instead of categorizing people into combatants and non-combatants as in the Western tradition, Islam distinguishes between those “who should be killed; who may be saved (by discretion) and who must be spared...This distinction leaves a great deal of ambiguity regarding various categories.”⁶² However, John Kelsay states that bin Laden distorts “Islamic tradition further than it can go without being broken, particularly in the areas of proportionality and the killing of innocent people: the second contravenes the Qur’anic command in Q.5:32, which indicates that if anyone kills another unjustly, it is as though he or she killed the entire world.”⁶³ The preponderance of text in the Koran and hadith contradict al-Qaeda’s justifications.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Esposito, 157.

⁶¹ Osama bin Laden, in *Messages to the World*, 16.

⁶² Shmuel Bar, *Jihad Ideology in Light of Contemporary Fatwas*, Research Monograph Series 1, no. 1 (Washington D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2006), 10.

⁶³ Bonney, 362.

⁶⁴ Youssef H. Aboul-Enein and Sherifa Zuhur, *Islamic Rulings and Warfare*, Strategic Studies Institute Monograph (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 2004).

Closely associated with the debate concerning these *Jus in Bello* arguments is the question of WMD use by al-Qaeda. There is no long-standing Islamic jurisprudence by which to justify the use of WMD, but the subject has received attention in the recent past:

Justification and acquisition and possible use of nuclear weapons has been treated in a number of *fatwas* for over a decade. The deliberations on this subject distinguish between obtaining nuclear weapons and actually using them. The prevailing argument is that as long as nuclear weapons are held by the ‘enemies’ of the Muslims (e.g. the United States, Israel) or any other nation at all, it is the Islamic duty of all Muslim countries to acquire such weapons...The aim of having these weapons is, first and foremost, deterrence; to ‘awaken fear in the land of *kufr*.⁶⁵

Bin Laden’s thoughts on nuclear weapons mirror those above. In a December 1998 interview, he stated that it is a duty of Muslims to acquire nuclear weapons, praising Pakistan for their successful effort to do so.⁶⁶ Three years later bin Laden claimed to be in possession of nuclear weapons, but that they were for the deterrence of the West.⁶⁷ An important point is that both the arguments cited above and bin Laden’s own statements the use off WMD would presumably occur only after a similar attack on Muslims.

A significant point of departure from these justifications occurred in 2003. Saudi Sheikh Naser bin Hamad al-Fahd released a fatwa claiming “that those countries that lead the campaign against the use of WMD – the United States and the United Kingdom – have already used WMD in the past against their enemies, not to mention that they, plus ‘the Jews,’ posses these weapons.”⁶⁸ Al-Fahd legitimizes WMD use through vague references from the Hadith.⁶⁹ He also

⁶⁵ Bar, *Jihad Ideology*, 14. *Kufr* used here is “unbelief.”

⁶⁶ Bin Laden, *Messages to the World*, 72.

⁶⁷ Osama bin Laden, *What Does Al-Qaeda Want*. Robert O. Marlin IV, editor. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 41. The translation of this particular statement is in question. In *Messages to the World*, p. 142, instead of “deterrence,” the particular passage referenced is translated as “we will not perish.” Hoffman and Howarth are critical of this translation as apocryphal. See footnote 5, page 142.

⁶⁸ Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD: Between Martyrdom and Mass Destruction,” *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology* 2 (2005): 79.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

attempts to deal with the problem of discrimination: that Muslims and children are likely to be killed in a nuclear attack. His fatwa declares that “use of such weapons against the United States is obligatory. The basic justification is reciprocity; the behavior of the United States against the Muslims is such that it warrants use of weapons of mass destruction.”⁷⁰ However, al-Fahd recanted most of his controversial fatwas in 2003, several months after his arrest in Saudi Arabia. Aside from this fatwa, Reuven Paz found that “Islamic scholars, clerics, intellectuals, and even most ordinary Islamist extremists seem to refrain from supporting the use of WMD by Islamist groups, fearing the consequences of such use for the entire Muslim world.”⁷¹

The various arguments presented by al-Qaeda must be judged against the traditional Islamic interpretations of what constitutes legitimate war and legitimate violence. The greater Muslim community must assess for itself whether these arguments stand up to Islamic tradition, a review of these arguments demonstrates that while Muslims may have grievances against the West, there are serious flaws in the explanations that al-Qaeda puts forward. Al-Qaeda may share the same grievances with a majority of Muslims, but a majority of Muslims may not advocate the tactics pursued by al-Qaeda. While it may be understood that Muslims view their culture and religion under some form of attack from the West, the nature of al-Qaeda’s violence put it outside of the traditions of defensive jihad. Al-Qaeda’s justification for killing civilians stands in stark contrast to the preponderance of Islamic religious texts. Simply put, the indiscriminate killing of civilians is clearly taboo according to the earliest traditions of Mohammed. The prohibition on indiscriminate killing places serious obstacles in the path to the legitimization of WMD use.

One justification that warrants careful attention is reciprocity. The theme of reciprocity runs through both the justification used to kill civilians and for the potential use of WMD. Within a population that feels itself under attack and the victim of unjust violence, reciprocity would provide a powerful reason to engage

⁷⁰ Bar, *Jihad Ideology*, 15.

⁷¹ Paz, 85.

in violence that would traditionally be frowned upon. There is likely a point at which Muslims may indeed decide that although they dislike indiscriminate killing of civilians, the need for some level of reciprocity may help justify it. This would represent a dangerous turning point in accepting greater levels of violence, like the use of WMD, against civilians.

C. JIHADIS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS REACT

As noted in the previous section, al-Qaeda's justifications for violence are a tough sell for the larger Muslim community. In fact, even those groups that might be expected to support al-Qaeda's violence have reacted in a negative manner. After September 11, a variety of groups have issued denunciations of al-Qaeda and its attacks. Included in these groups are organizations historically at odds with the West (such as Hezbollah and Hamas), practitioners of suicide terrorism, and labeled as terrorist organizations by the United States. It is significant that these groups, traditionally opposed to Westerners (and in the case of Hezbollah, responsible for attacks against Westerners) would reject al-Qaeda's attacks. The resistance takes two forms. First, there is a refutation of al-Qaeda's attempts to justify the attacks through religious interpretation. Second - and likely more important for these groups - is a pragmatic reaction based on the fear of retribution from the West towards all Islamic fundamentalist groups.

1. Rejecting Al-Qaeda's Religious Justification

Al-Qaeda faces significant hurdles in justifying its indiscriminate violence because their arguments have implications that concern more than just the legitimization of violence, but of who has the authority to interpret Islam. Analyzing al-Qaeda's justification for September 11, Wiktorowicz and Kaltner found that:

The debate over the conditions for permissible violence is therefore more than merely a conflict over ideas; it is a struggle over sacred authority – the right to interpret Islam on behalf of the Muslim community. As studies of persuasion and framing have noted, the

impact of an argument is determined not only by its resonance...but by the credibility of the articulator as well.⁷²

In this respect, al-Qaeda and its defenders face an uphill battle in convincing others to accept their argument. First, al-Qaeda's calls for jihad are questionable because, "Even in the language of those who assert Muslims' fundamental right to physical jihad, historical precedents suggest that resort to force requires authorization from some higher authority."⁷³ Only by their own claims does al-Qaeda possess this authority, because they do not possess widespread religious legitimacy. "The jihadi scholars who nurture al-Qaeda and provide religious cover for acts of violence suffer from a 'reputation deficit.'"⁷⁴ Al-Qaeda's lack of legitimacy within the greater Muslim world seriously detracts from their ability to convince their coreligionists that indiscriminate attacks against Western civilians are just:

Bin Laden and Zawahiri faced a difficult battle in their efforts to incite a large pool of recruits to come to their defense because they lacked legitimacy and a credible religious cover. Equally important, they possessed no social base of support outside of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and, to a much smaller extent, Pakistan, from which they drew most of their foot soldiers.⁷⁵

The attempt by al-Qaeda to usurp religious authority is not well received. Far from being accepted as a legitimate voice of Islamic authority, al-Qaeda's arguments are largely rejected by even the most anti-Western of groups. These include Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya, "the largest jihadist organization in the Arab world", Hamas, and Hezbollah.⁷⁶ These groups issued various denunciations following the September 11 attacks. One of the most prominent rejections, signed by 46 leaders of Islamic movements, was published on September 14:

⁷² Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, "Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11," *Middle East Policy*, 10 (June 2003), 80.

⁷³ Bar and Minzili, 133.

⁷⁴ Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, 4.

⁷⁵ Gerges, 189.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 200.

The undersigned, leaders of Islamic movements, are horrified by the events of Tuesday 11 September 2001 in the United States, which resulted in massive killing, destruction and attack on innocent lives. We express our deepest sympathies and sorrow. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the incidents, which are against all human and Islamic norms. This is grounded in the Noble Laws of Islam, which forbid all forms of attacks on innocents.⁷⁷

What is striking in many of these condemnations, especially given widespread Western perceptions that these groups are indiscriminate killers, is the assertion that al-Qaeda's attacks violate Islamic law by targeting civilians. Hassan al-Turabi (once bin Laden's host in Sudan), numerous Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya authors, and Hezbollah spiritual leader Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah have all clearly condemned the civilian deaths caused by al-Qaeda as wrong and contrary to Islamic law.⁷⁸ Al-Qaeda may have expected the same legitimacy given to Palestinian suicide bombers to be applied to their attacks, but this was not the case.⁷⁹ The crucial point is that even the most radical groups draw a critical distinction between what was regarded as legitimate and illegitimate targets. Gilles Kepel notes that:

Luminaries of "moderate" Islamism, such as the TV preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi (and Egyptian Sheikh from Qatar who hosts the most popular religious talk show on Al Jazeera), condemned the hijackings. The anti-Israeli suicide attacks of the Palestinians could be justified as martyrdom, he said, since they were part of a defensive jihad aimed at reclaiming Palestinian Islamic land that had been usurped by the Jews. Furthermore, Israeli civilian victims in restaurants and on buses, women included, were soldiers temporarily out of uniform, since in Israel every Jewish citizen is either a conscript or a reservist. Thus, Palestinian bombers were "martyrs" in a just war, not "suicides." But the sheikh condemned the September 11 hijackers as suicides rather than martyrs because, contrary to Muslim teaching, they had unduly taken the lives Allah had given them. The difference, according to Sheikh

⁷⁷ Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, 1.

⁷⁸ Gerges, 234, 202-203, 227, 237.

⁷⁹ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 103.

Qaradawi, was that America is not a legitimate target of defensive jihad, and therefore martyrdom in a fight against the United States on its soil is not possible.⁸⁰

The discrimination being made is crucial to understanding the importance of religious legitimacy to fundamentalist groups. Fundamentalists carefully construct their arguments to fit Islamic law; the weakness of al-Qaeda's religious legitimacy and their arguments justifying indiscriminate killings corrode the ability of other organizations to maintain their own legitimacy. If unbridled murder is permitted under Islamic law, why have Hamas and Hezbollah so carefully constructed their arguments? Accepting al-Qaeda's interpretation of what is permissible would be a tacit admission that Hamas and Hezbollah's justifications for killing Israelis are little more than window dressing for terrorism. The dilution of their existing legitimacy within the Muslim world is unacceptable to most fundamentalist organizations.

It must be remembered that the critics of al-Qaeda within the fundamentalist and jihadist world are solidly anti-Western and highly critical of United States' policies, yet they do not hesitate to reject the killing of civilians, even if they are Americans, because it violates their religious beliefs. This is sometimes lost in the Western media portrayal of Muslim reactions to September 11, because "many of these condemnations were blunted by concomitant criticism of American foreign policy as the primary catalyst for al-Qaeda's war."⁸¹ But the accompanying criticism of the United States should be seen as further proof these groups soundly reject al-Qaeda; although al-Qaeda has struck against a common enemy, the violation of Islamic norms is too great to sanction.

Perhaps the best example of this attitude comes from Hezbollah's spiritual leader. Prior to September 11, Hezbollah was responsible for more American deaths than any other terrorist group. Yet Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah "challenged Al Qaeda's claim that its attacks on the United States could be religiously sanctioned."⁸² Fawaz Gerges writes that Fadlallah's "debunking of bin

⁸⁰ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 103.

⁸¹ Wiktorowicz and Kaltner, 1.

⁸² Gerges, 237.

Laden and Zawahiri's notion of transnationalized jihad" is important "because he is one of the most prominent radical clerics opposed to American foreign policy, and he is highly respected across the broad spectrum of Sunni and Shiite Muslims."⁸³ Gerges writes that the implications of this rejection by a Muslim leader of Fadallah's stature are overwhelmingly negative for al-Qaeda. He asks, "If Al Qaeda cannot co-opt this constituency, who can it co-opt?"⁸⁴

An examination of Islamic fundamentalists' rejection of al-Qaeda's justification for violence clearly shows that bin Laden and Zawahiri have failed in their attempts to convince even the most extreme groups of the legitimacy of their methods. Fundamentalist groups share al-Qaeda's hatred for the West, and the United States in particular; however, this has not translated into a sanctioning of indiscriminate violence against Americans. Quite to the contrary, the majority of these groups have come out solidly against al-Qaeda's indiscriminate attacks against civilians as contrary to Islamic law. Al-Qaeda enjoys no legitimacy, and certainly no following, in this respect. Since the jihadi community has rejected al-Qaeda's violence thus far, they could not be expected to sanction the use of WMD against America.

2. Pragmatic Fear

Aside from the theological rejection of al-Qaeda's violence, radical fundamentalist and jihadi groups have another strong motivation to reject al-Qaeda: fear of Western retribution. Montasser al-Zayyat, in *The Road to al-Qaeda*, writes, "Islamists across the globe were adversely affected by the September 11 attacks on the United States. Even Islamic movements that did not target the United States are paying the price for this folly."⁸⁵ Al-Zayyat, an Egyptian human rights lawyer, is a dedicated Islamist and no friend to the United States. He explains that even though the United States should be resisted by all Islamists, the methods used matter. He criticizes al-Qaeda's September 11 attacks as failing to account for their impact on the Islamists' movement: "Bin

⁸³ Gerges, 238.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda*, translated by Ahmed Fekryi, edited by Sara Nimis (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 96.

Laden's desire to take revenge heedless of the American and international response, and its effect on the future of the Islamic movements in the world, has given the Americans and other governments the power to destroy the Islamists before our eyes."⁸⁶ Al-Zayyat's sentiments reflect a "utilitarian and pragmatic" critique of al-Qaeda that worries about retribution from the sole remaining super-power.⁸⁷

Fawaz Gerges devotes a major portion of *The Far Enemy* to explaining the reaction of jihadists and fundamentalists to al-Qaeda's attacks.⁸⁸ The main jihadist groups accused al-Qaeda of "endangering the very survival of their movement."⁸⁹ He writes that "more than a dozen books, memoirs, and diaries written by leading jihadis, some of whom have played critical roles in the jihadist movement, have presented a devastatingly comprehensive critique of Al Qaeda...These critiques are important because it comes from within the movement , not from outside it."⁹⁰ Instead of uniting the Muslim jihadi movement behind them, the "non-al-Qaeda jihadis in general did not heed bin Laden and Zawahiri's call and join the fight against the United States."⁹¹ Instead, Gerges notes that Zayyat blames al-Qaeda for unifying the world against the "fundamentalist current" instead of the other way around.⁹² Gerges claims he has "not heard a single former jihadi praise Al Qaeda or support its tactics, although many think that the United States exaggerates the network's power and reach for cynical foreign policy reasons."⁹³ Summarizing jihadi reaction, Gerges says:

In a nutshell, the core of the jihadis' critique is a direct assault on what the religious nationalists view as the short-sidedness and

⁸⁶ Zayyat, 96.

⁸⁷ Gerges, 226.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 185-250. Gerges presents a comprehensive review of Muslim reaction to al-Qaeda.

⁸⁹ Gerges, 190.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁹¹ Ibid., 187.

⁹² Ibid., 221.

⁹³ Ibid., 228.

colossal miscalculations of bin Laden and Zawahiri. Although these veteran militants are highly critical of America and its foreign policies, they say that killing American civilians has proved to be disastrous for the Islamist and jihadist movements, and for the ummah as well.⁹⁴

Even some of bin Laden's inner circle have criticized the decision to attack America. Abu al-Waid al-Marsi, a key Arab in the Afghan war, published a scathing critique of bin Laden. It "shows restiveness and bitterness among Al Qaeda's top-echelon leadership after suffering crippling blows since September 11."⁹⁵ Instead of aligning jihadis with them, al-Qaeda's violence oriented those groups against them. Bar and Minzili share Gerges' assessment of jihadi reaction to al-Qaeda:

The older generation of al-Qaeda linked salafi ulama is clearly growing uneasy. Included in this group are Abu Basir al-Tartusi, who took a stand against the London bombing on the basis of his interpretation of Islamic law on jihad; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who criticized Zarqawi, his erstwhile disciple, in a public statement on the same basis; and Mohammed al-Masari, one of the fathers of the Saudi reform movement in London. These scholars hold undeniable salafi-jihadi credentials and are close to Zawahiri ideologically and organizationally.⁹⁶

Again, Gerges asks, "If jihadis do not take Al Qaeda's bait, what constituencies would?"⁹⁷

As one might expect, the lack of support for al-Qaeda's attacks displayed by jihadi groups was echoed by more moderate leaders as well. Gerges writes that "like former jihadis, leading mainstream Islamists – Muslim Brothers, independents, and clerics – condemned Al Qaeda's attacks on the United States as harmful to Islam and Muslims, not just to Americans."⁹⁸ The religious

⁹⁴ Gerges, 191.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 191-192.

⁹⁶ Bar and Minzili, 46.

⁹⁷ Gerges, 229.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 234.

establishment, whose authority was challenged by al-Qaeda's attempt to rewrite what constituted just violence, similarly turned away.⁹⁹

Did massive, indiscriminate violence against the United States reward al-Qaeda with a widespread following and mass support? No. "Al Qaeda's grand failure lay in its inability to tap into the natural base of tens of thousands of like-minded jihadis – religious nationalists – who live throughout the Muslim landscape."¹⁰⁰ Al-Qaeda's decision to strike the United States instead showed that "the Al Qaeda chiefs, not Islamic Group leaders, are swimming against the current of the times and the dominant trend within the jihadist movement."¹⁰¹ Based on the reactions to September 11, Al-Qaeda can not expect to achieve their goals through similar or larger attacks.

Examining reactions to September 11 reveals two crucial factors that have shaped the response. First, legitimacy within the jihadi world matters. Al-Qaeda's lack of religious authority coupled with its weak arguments for indiscriminate killing has been met with sound rejection by its peers. A second important factor in the reaction to al-Qaeda is fear of retribution from the West. The pragmatic criticisms leveled at al-Qaeda suggest that Western diplomatic, law enforcement, and military power are widely feared within the fundamentalist community. This fear of reprisal has not only deterred groups from supporting al-Qaeda, but resulted in widespread denunciations of their activities and ideology. These rebuttals came despite the fact that they originate from groups that embody the very deepest of hatred for U.S. foreign policy. The failure to gain religious legitimacy coupled with fundamentalists' fear of an overwhelming response has resulted in the majority of fundamentalist groups turning away from al-Qaeda. Bin Laden and Zawahiri's failure to unite Islamic extremists behind them has made al-Qaeda the "poor cousins of the jihadist family."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Gerges, 238-239.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰² Ibid., 228.

If al-Qaeda is to find support for a WMD attack within the Muslim world, it will not be from their fellow jihadis or fundamentalists. Judging from their reactions since September 11, these groups will not sanction such an attack because there is not support for higher levels of indiscriminate killing, and they fear for the very existence of their movement in the face of what would be an overwhelming response by the United States and its allies.

D. THE MUSLIM MASSES

If fellow jihadists and fundamentalists groups have not answered al-Qaeda's call to jihad, bin Laden and Zawahiri's hopes lie with the greater Muslim community. Even if al-Qaeda had managed to unify the fundamentalist community behind them, the greater constituency is still important:

It is important to understand terrorists' other target audience – the aggrieved populations that they purport to represent. This latter group, not to be confused with terrorists' actual cadres, extends to a broader, less radicalized population that has the power to confer a degree of legitimacy on the terrorists simply by responding positively to their tactics.¹⁰³

In the case of al-Qaeda, we must attempt to gauge the degree of legitimacy they have achieved within the Muslim community, and whether this community accepts the indiscriminate killing of civilians that could lead al-Qaeda to believe a future WMD attack could be acceptable, if not advantageous to its strategic goals.

Measuring the sentiments of a diverse group of people numbering over one billion worldwide is a complicated task. The polls examined here, although they represent the best public opinion data available, can hardly account for the complexity of the Muslim population; they can offer only the broadest of generalizations. Polling has not covered all Muslim countries; the sparse data collected in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia detract significantly from the overall results. Furthermore, a Pew analysis found that the states themselves were a

103 Bar and Minzili, 131-132.

major factor in determining attitudes on support for terror.¹⁰⁴ These omissions are significant because opinions do differ considerably between Muslim states.

Survey data represents mostly indirect evidence related to answering the questions central to this thesis. No comprehensive surveys have been done asking if Muslims felt the September 11 attacks were justified, or if they would support a WMD attack on the United States itself. However, there are several key indicators of support for terror:

- Support for suicide attacks against civilians
- Support for attacks against Israelis
- Support for attacks against Americans and Westerners in Iraq
- Favorability/confidence ratings of bin Laden

Lack of pre-September 11, 2001 survey data makes before and after comparisons impossible. Some data exists showing Muslim discontent with America prior to September 11, but data on support for Osama bin Laden and suicide bombings is not available on a regional basis prior to the attacks. Without the earlier data it is impossible to analyze the effect September 11 had on opinions; however, we can measure overall levels of support in these areas. The analysis below assumes that current attitudes are the most relevant in impacting al-Qaeda's decision making process.

1. Do Unfavorable Ratings Equate to Justified Violence?

Following September 11, America was confronted with the realization that the United States was, in many regions of the world, widely disliked if not hated. Subsequent surveys conducted by Zogby International and the Pew Global Attitudes Project examined both the magnitude of dislike and what specific aspects of the United States that caused these feelings. As seen in Tables 1 and 2, both polls show large majorities in Muslim countries holding unfavorable views of the United States.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Wike and Nilanthi Samaranayake, *Where Terrorism Finds Support in the Muslim World*, Pew Global Attitudes Project. May 23, 2006, <http://pewresearch.org/obdeck/?ObDeckID=26> (accessed October 2006).

Impression	Egypt		Jordan		Lebanon	
	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav
USA	15/76	14/85	34/61	33/63	26/70	32/66
China	60/20	70/15	56/27	68/26	60/29	46/25
India	34/45	50/19	40/42	55/37	51/35	38/30
Russia	37/36	28/41	44/38	55/35	62/28	45/33

Impression	Morocco		Saudi Arabia		UAE	
	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav	2002 Fav/Unfav	2005 Fav/Unfav
USA	38/61	34/64	12/87	9/89	11/87	21/73
China	55/43	52/37	71/23	40/41	18/69	34/40
India	48/48	39/47	54/41	39/43	34/57	58/23
Russia	28/66	30/55	51/43	21/62	12/73	25/47

Table 1. Zogby Poll 2002/2005 U.S. Favorability Ratings (From: James Zogby, *Attitudes of Arabs 2005* (Washington D.C.: Arab American Institute, 2005).

Questions about the reasons for this dislike clearly indicate that they are the result of negative perceptions of United States' policy in the Middle East, not a universal loathing of everything American.¹⁰⁵ In fact, "Arabs and Muslims appeared to like various aspects of American life and culture."¹⁰⁶ This raises an important question: would Muslims sanction the killing of civilians whom they share at least some values with? The gap between Muslim dislike of policies and the somewhat favorable ratings of other aspects of Americans suggests that Muslims may not consider killing American civilians as a legitimate response to their grievances.

¹⁰⁵ James Zogby, "Why Do They Hate Us," *The Link* 36, no. 4 (October-November 2003); *International Surveys: What We Are Finding*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2002), <http://pewglobal.org/commentary/display.php?AnalysisID=46> (accessed October 2006).

¹⁰⁶ Zogby, "Why Do They Hate Us."

	Favorable Opinions of the U.S.					
	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Great Britain	83	75	70	58	55	56
France	62	63	43	37	43	39
Germany	78	61	45	38	41	37
Spain	50	--	38	--	41	23
Russia	37	61	36	47	52	43
Indonesia	75	61	15	--	38	30
Egypt	--	--	--	--	--	30
Pakistan	23	10	13	21	23	27
Jordan	--	25	1	5	21	15
Turkey	52	30	15	30	23	12
Nigeria	46	--	61	--	--	62
Japan	77	72	--	--	--	63
India	--	54	--	--	71	56
China	--	--	--	--	42	47

1999/2000 survey trends provided by the Office of Research, U.S. Department of State

Table 2. Favorable Opinions of the U.S. (From: *America's Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concern over Iran, Hamas*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2005).

Do these highly unfavorable opinions translate into support for a WMD attack against the United States? If those harboring negative views of the United States believe al-Qaeda's justifications and approve of its methods, one would expect to find correspondingly high levels of support for frequent suicide attacks against civilians. While Pew found that unfavorable opinions towards the United States did correlate with higher support for terrorism, this has not necessarily translated into a high level of support for frequent suicide bombing of civilians.¹⁰⁷ Figures 1 and 2 above show a dismal level of favorable opinions of the United States in the Muslim countries. Yet the Muslim countries sampled in 2006 do not show a correspondingly high level of belief that these bombings against civilians are "often justified."¹⁰⁸ The following question was posed:

107 Wike and Samaranayake.

108 Pew Global Attitudes Project, *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/253.pdf> (accessed October 2006).

Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?¹⁰⁹

In the 2006 Pew survey, the following percentage of respondents answered “often justified”: ¹¹⁰

- Egypt 8%
- Nigeria 8%
- Pakistan 7%
- Jordan 5%
- Turkey 3%
- Indonesia 2%

If the high level of dislike in Muslim countries translates into support for al-Qaeda, the number of respondents who see suicide attacks against civilians as “often justified” should be high. This is not the case. It turns out that Muslim publics are very discriminating in what they see as justified violence. For example, support for suicide bombings against both Israelis and Americans and Westerners in Iraq are much higher than support for suicide attacks against civilians in general.¹¹¹ The only explanation for this is that Muslims draw clear distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence. Even though large majorities in Muslim countries dislike the U.S. because of its foreign policies, this does not appear to equate with large numbers of people who support the most extreme frequency of suicide attacks. While this is an indirect measure, the disparity between high unfavorable ratings of the U.S. and support for suicide bombing of civilians indicates that Muslim populations would overwhelmingly not support massive, indiscriminate violence against civilians in the United States.

¹⁰⁹ Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics*, (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2005) <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf> (accessed October 2006).

¹¹⁰ Pew, *The Great Divide*, 57.

¹¹¹ Pew Global Attitudes Project, *A Year After Iraq War*, (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2004), <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/206.pdf> (accessed October 2006).

2. Support for Osama Bin Laden and Disbelief in 9/11

Along with the high unfavorable ratings of the U.S., confidence placed in Osama bin Laden by Muslims in many countries is alarming. In one country surveyed, Nigeria, a majority of those Muslims polled placed at least some confidence in bin Laden; many other countries contained sizeable minorities expressing a similar confidence.

Country	A lot/some	Not too much/ None
Turkey	4	79
Jordan	24	74
Egypt	26	71
Indonesia	33	52
Pakistan	38	30
Nigerian Muslims	61	33

Table 3. Confidence in Osama bin Laden (After: *Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006)).

These numbers appear to defy the analysis in the previous section. But again, the numbers are not as simple as they appear. First, if these numbers represented support for al-Qaeda's justification for killing civilians, then those numbers indicating support for suicide attacks against civilians as "often justified" should at least correspond to the numbers showing confidence in bin Laden. The fact that sizable minorities in several countries have some confidence in bin Laden, without correspondingly high numbers who believe that killing civilians is "often justified" begs for alternative explanations.

The answer could be that in many Muslim countries, a majority of those surveyed do not believe that Arabs carried out the September 11 attacks. If some Muslims do not believe that bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 attacks then they could express confidence in bin Laden as a Muslim icon without believing that attacks on civilians are "often justified."

Country	Yes	No	Don't Know/Refused
Indonesia	16	65	20
Egypt	32	59	9
Turkey	16	59	25
Jordan	39	53	8
Pakistan	15	41	44
Nigerian Muslims	42	47	11

Table 4. Did Arabs Carry Out 9/11 Attacks? (After: *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006).

Interestingly, in every country but Nigeria, the survey showed the percent of respondents who have confidence in bin Laden is less than the percentage who do not believe that Arabs carried out the September 11 attacks:

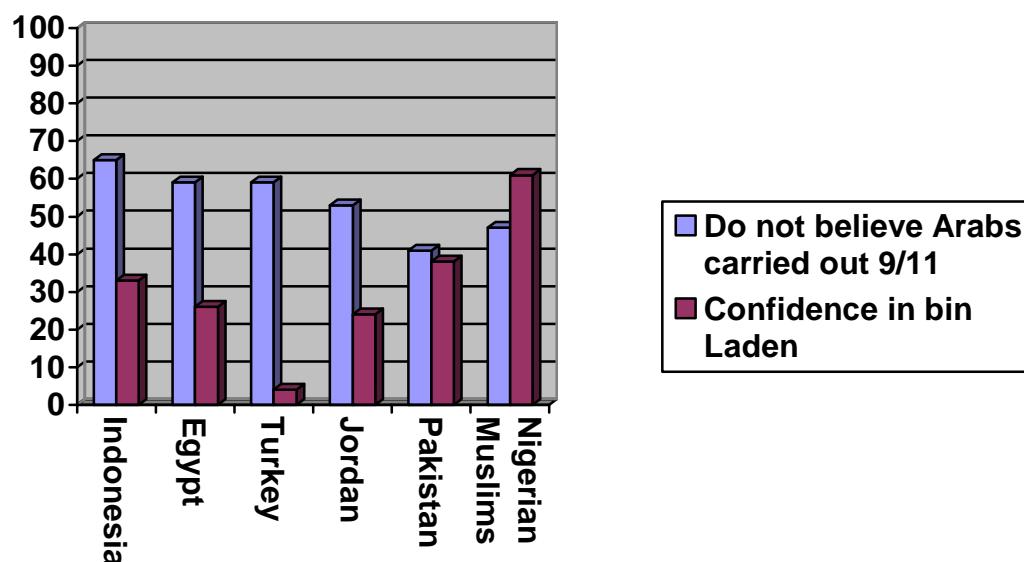


Figure 1. Disbelief that Arabs carried out 9/11 vs. confidence in bin Laden (After: *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006; *Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006)).

This opens up a potential explanation. In the case of the Nigerian Muslim community, a small percentage of people believe Arabs carried out the September 11 attacks and yet still have confidence in bin Laden. For the remainder of the countries surveyed, it is at least a possibility that those who express confidence in bin Laden also constitute a large majority of those who do not believe that Arabs committed the attacks (and, by obvious extension, bin Laden was not responsible). The implication is significant: the numbers expressing confidence in bin Laden may not necessarily imply acceptance of al-Qaeda's tactics. In fact, this explanation seems more plausible when one remembers that very small percentages of Muslims accept that killing civilians is frequently justified. To be sure, this explanation likely explains only part of the polling data, but it calls into question any assertion that the Muslim community would support mass indiscriminate killing of civilians, as would be experienced in a WMD attack.

The widespread denial of Arab involvement in the September 11 attacks has serious implications when examining al-Qaeda's decision to use WMD. If Muslims are not inclined to hold al-Qaeda accountable, will there be any consequences for carrying out an attack? Likewise, will al-Qaeda believe in its ability to mobilize supporters if a majority of Muslims do not think it is capable of conducting such an attack? This survey result introduces a considerable unknown variable into the decision making process.

Muslim opinion matters because al-Qaeda's strategy relies so heavily on gaining support from their coreligionists. Polling data is not comprehensive, the questions asked have only indirect bearings on questions of WMD legitimacy, and some data appears to contradict itself. But by carefully examining the complexities of response, a few conclusions are evident. First, the highly unfavorable ratings that Muslims give the United States are a major problem because al-Qaeda attempts to usurp these feelings to justify its own violence. However, the negative feelings towards the United States do not translate into a belief that frequently killing civilians in defense of Islam is justified. If most Muslims believe a WMD attack against an American city was justified, those

numbers supporting frequent suicide bombings of civilians should be higher. The differences between dislike of the United States, support for killing civilians, and support for suicide attacks in Israel and Iraq indicate that Muslims differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate violence. Confidence in Osama bin Laden by a significant minority of Muslims may be the by-product of conspiracy theories running rampant throughout the Muslim world. The widespread disbelief in an Arab hand in September 11 is a major complication in determining how al-Qaeda may gauge the level of support it enjoys, as well as an indicator of the high level of distrust Muslims feel towards the United States. If September 11 is not attributed to al-Qaeda, would they feel free to attack the United States without significant backlash from Muslim populations, or does al-Qaeda understand that the minority expressing confidence in bin Laden does not necessarily mean there is sufficient support for a WMD attack against the United States? The disfavor and distrust of the United States allows far too much ambiguity in interpreting Muslim sentiments.

E. CONCLUSION

Against the background of Islamic tradition, al-Qaeda's call may resonate with Muslims, but its manifestation is regarded as illegitimate. Al-Qaeda's justification for killing civilians is shaky; its arguments for the use of WMD are even weaker. The jihadi and fundamentalist communities have not reacted positively to September 11. While they share an animosity towards the West with al-Qaeda and a majority of Muslims, they regard al-Qaeda's attacks as violating Islamic law. Maintaining a discriminating stance on what constitutes legitimate violence is important to the credibility of these groups; al-Qaeda erodes this legitimacy. The fear of Western retribution is a significant factor in jihadi and fundamentalist rejection of al-Qaeda; they are seen as recklessly endangering these movements. Clearly al-Qaeda cannot expect that these groups would support a WMD attack against America.

The analysis of Muslim opinion in general is less optimistic. While widespread dislike of the United States in the Muslim world may not translate into support for a WMD attack, al-Qaeda may not come to the same conclusion. The

majorities shown to disbelieve that Arabs carried out September 11 may be allowing a significant minority of people to still express confidence in Osama bin Laden, even if they would not sanction al-Qaeda's tactics. Al-Qaeda may see the confidence expressed in bin Laden as an encouragement of their tactics, not understanding that the foundation of these feelings is not an endorsement for killings Western civilians, but an enormous lack of trust in the West. The negative sentiments that the U.S. has accrued allow too much ambiguity in determining if Muslims would support a WMD attack against America. A careful analysis shows this to be doubtful, but al-Qaeda may see it differently.

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IV. AL-QAEDA REACTS

A. INTRODUCTION

Al-Qaeda cares very much about the sentiments of Muslims, but the reaction of this constituency has been anything but positive. While al-Qaeda shares a hatred for the West with many in the Muslim world, their violence has been largely rejected. The fundamentalist and jihadi communities have turned against their tactics. The greater Muslim public does not endorse the indiscriminate killing of civilians. These two together – al-Qaeda's appeal for constituent support and the constituencies' refusal to sanction indiscriminate violence against civilians indicate that al-Qaeda would limit its attacks to avoid negative reaction. Is there any evidence that al-Qaeda will take these sentiments into account?

The desire for constituent approval and a corresponding lack of this approval are necessary but not sufficient conditions to constrain violence. Al-Qaeda will not be constrained unless it also shows an awareness of this constituent disapproval and a willingness to change its tactics as a result. This chapter will examine the extent to which al-Qaeda is pragmatic in its search for support; demonstrate that al-Qaeda is aware of negative sentiments within the Muslim world; and how their pragmatism has manifested itself by constraining violence. This will demonstrate that there are sufficient conditions for al-Qaeda to be constrained in the type of violence it feels is productive. This has clear implications on al-Qaeda's decision to use WMD; if they are constrained from employing certain attacks against civilians, there is a strong argument that the use of WMD may be similarly limited.

This chapter will also examine evidence that some claim indicates al-Qaeda has already made the decision to use WMD. Statements by al-Qaeda their reported interest in and attempts to acquire WMD are commonly cited as proof that they will not hesitate to use these weapons. A careful examination of

this evidence will show that al-Qaeda's efforts in this regard do not necessarily indicate a predisposition towards WMD use.

B. THE MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE

1. Pragmatism

Demonstrating that al-Qaeda seeks a constituency and that this constituency may not support a WMD attack does not necessarily mean al-Qaeda will constrain itself. Al-Qaeda will not be constrained by Muslim sentiment unless it demonstrates a willingness to modify the means it uses to achieve its ends. Is al-Qaeda willing to change its tactics to gain the ummah's support? Chapter II noted that this is behind al-Qaeda's decision to shift from targeting apostate governments in the Middle East to the United States - Zawahiri believed the attacks would rally the ummah.¹¹² This indicates that al-Qaeda does indeed change its strategy based upon anticipation of positive Muslim reaction. Could pragmatism also function to constrain al-Qaeda's violence if it was having negative effects?

The need to tailor violence in order to achieve intended effects is not a new concept. All terrorist groups seeking popular support "execute a controlled use of violence as a means to achieving their specific political ends. Doing too much can be just as damaging to the cause as doing too little."¹¹³ Faced with this dilemma, groups have two choices. They can choose to ignore negative sentiments being created by their attacks in favor of ideological purity, or they can adopt a degree of pragmatism. Al Qaeda is not immune to this dilemma, and the evidence suggests that for the time being they have chosen pragmatism over ideology.¹¹⁴

Naji and Zawahiri devote considerable thought to these issues. Both explicitly state the need to manage violence in order to gain and maintain public

112 Gerges, 25-26.

113 Combating Terrorism Center, *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities*, The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 14 February, 2006,11. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/Harmony%20and%20Disharmony%20--%20CTC.pdf>. (accessed October 2006).

114 CTC, *Harmony and Disharmony*, 12.

support. Naji recognizes that “the Muslim public is particularly troubled...by the jihadis excessive use of violence, particularly against other Muslims.”¹¹⁵ He also

...worries that low ranking members of the movement will initiate their own large scale attacks against high-value targets. Medium and small attacks are fine...but launching another 9/11-type attack or targeting certain classes of people is a decision best left to the High Command – targeting the wrong people at the wrong time would turn the masses against the movement.¹¹⁶

Zawahiri’s letter to Zarqawi clearly indicates that Zawahiri understands the need for pragmatism if al-Qaeda is to gain support. Zawahiri counsels Zarqawi, “You well know that purity of faith and the correct way of living are not connected necessarily to success in the field unless you take into consideration the reasons and practices which events are guided by.”¹¹⁷ Zawahiri places the full responsibility for convincing the masses on the jihadis themselves, rather than blaming the ummah for not understanding al-Qaeda’s violence. This distinction cannot be over-emphasized, because it implicitly acknowledges that jihadis realize they do not have the freedom to execute violence without careful consideration of how the ummah will receive it. Gilles Kepel notes that although Zawahiri holds a lowly view of the masses, he says “we must not blame the umma for not reacting or not being up to the task. We are to blame for not having been able to get our message across, not having been able to convey our compassion and the sacrifices we have made.”¹¹⁸ In essence, Zawahiri is saying the *customer is always right* when it comes to accepting or rejecting violence. It is up to the elite jihadis to tailor their violence and propaganda to gain support from the Muslim masses. Al-Qaeda’s number two man makes their choice clear: pragmatism is a necessary component of their strategy.

Zawahiri’s concerns are repeated in the letter from ‘Atiyah to Zarqawi. He counsels Zarqawi that “policy must be dominant over militarism...That is to say,

115 Brachman and McCants, 8.

116 Ibid.

117 Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

118 Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 96-97.

that military action is servant to policy.”¹¹⁹ ‘Atiyah draws on his experience in Algeria, where militants descended into slaughter and lost the support of the people. He says, “What use is it for us to delight in some operations and successful strikes when the immediate repercussion is a defeat for us of our call, and a loss of the justice of our cause and its logic in the minds of the masses who make up the people of the Muslim nation....” He also urges Zarqawi to “abstain from making any decision on a comprehensive issue (one with a broad reach), and on substantial matters until you have turned to your leadership; Shaykh Usamah and the Doctor, and their brothers their, and consult with them.”¹²⁰ An example of such an issue is “expanding the arena of the war to neighboring countries, and also undertaking some large-scale operations whose impact is great and whose influence is pervasive, and things of that nature.”¹²¹

Pragmatism governs al-Qaeda’s violence. Unless they are seen as “fighting a just war and walking the moral high ground,” jihadis will not receive the public support necessary to be a serious strategic threat to both Western and Middle Eastern governments.¹²² By their own admission the leaders and ideologues of violent jihadism are governed in both their words and deeds by the constituency they hope to mobilize.

2. Recognition of Norms

If pragmatism is to have any effect on the level and type of violence al-Qaeda perpetrates, they must be aware that some of what they’re doing is having negative consequences.

There is evidence suggesting that al-Qaeda is aware that their violence is not being accepted well in the Muslim world. Simon and Martini write, “Recent messages attributed to Al Qaeda suggest a consensus growing within the Muslim world against the targeting of noncombatants.”¹²³ The repeated justifications

119 ‘Atiyah, letter to Zarqawi letter, 3.

120 Ibid., 5.

121 Ibid., 5.

122 Brachman and McCants, 12.

123 Simon and Martini, 141.

al-Qaeda makes demonstrate knowledge that their behavior violates Islamic norms. Simon and Martini note that norms can be recognized indirectly by “ex post facto justifications.”¹²⁴ The literature states, “Norms prompt justifications for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors.”¹²⁵ If this is true, al-Qaeda has left a long trail of justifications that illustrate their tacit acknowledgement of norm violation. Simon and Martini conclude that al-Qaeda’s “determined efforts to revise the nature of targets are not insignificant; the attackers’ evident compulsion to redefine the identity of those killed indicates fear over the implication of killing civilians.”¹²⁶

In the wake of September 11, al-Qaeda’s behavior indicates they were aware the attacks were having an adverse effect on their constituency. Bin Laden did not take immediate credit for what are the most spectacular terrorist attacks of all time. Instead, bin Laden attempted to justify the attacks first as a reprisal for Muslim deaths. He then attempted to characterize the targets as “icons of military and economic power” instead of civilian targets.¹²⁷ He continued to offer new arguments. Gilles Kepel noted:

As if the weaknesses of his argument were visible even to himself, Bin Laden followed a different line of thinking in his next explanation; “The American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government, they elect their president, their government manufactures arms and gives them to Israel, and Israel uses them to massacre Palestinians. The American Congress endorses all government measures and this proves that [all] America is responsible for the atrocities perpetrated against Muslims. [All] America, because they elect the Congress.”¹²⁸

The timing of bin Laden’s first admission of responsibility for September 11 is significant: it coincided with the highly publicized Israeli incursion into the

124 Simon and Martini, 141.

125 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no.4 (Autumn, 1998): 892.

126 Simon and Martini, 141-142.

127 Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 125.

128 Ibid.

Jenin refugee camp, where a large number of civilian casualties occurred.¹²⁹ Bin Laden had waited more than seven months to claim responsibility in the hope that Muslim revulsion over September 11 would be lost in its anger at Israel and the West over Jenin.

Since September 11 public opinion has forced al-Qaeda to defend itself after attacks in Casablanca, Riyadh, and Istanbul.¹³⁰ Even Zarqawi, notorious for his brutality in Iraq, appears to be influenced by these social norms: "The unwillingness of Zarqawi's group to claim credit for unpopular attacks also indicates a growing sensitivity to public opinion commensurate with a drop in support among Sunnis."¹³¹ Simon and Martini concluded that, "In short, Al Qaeda's statements suggest that disregard for the sanctity of noncombatants is no longer without political cost among their constituencies."¹³²

3. Evidence of Constraint

The most concrete evidence that al-Qaeda is constrained in carried out indiscriminate violence is Zawahiri's rebuke to Zarqawi about the videotaped beheadings of Western hostages in Iraq. Zawahiri makes clear his feelings on the matter:

Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable - also- are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favor and blessing of God.¹³³

The author recognizes that even though Zarqawi may have a group of supporters that applaud his violence, they are not representative of the general

¹²⁹ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*. Israeli defense forces entered the Jenin refugee camp on April 9, 2002. The incursion, the largest in the West Bank since 1967, received widespread attention because of a large number of alleged civilian deaths at the hands of the Israelis.

¹³⁰ Simon and Martini, 141.

¹³¹ *Al-Qaeda Hampered In Iraq*, 2.

¹³² Simon and Martini, 141-142.

¹³³ Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

population that sees these actions as unacceptable. Zawahiri also explains how he views these executions in relation to American attacks: though he judges them to be no worse than what America has done, they are still not permissible:

And your response, while true, might be: Why shouldn't we sow terror in the hearts of the Crusaders and their helpers? And isn't the destruction of the villages and the cities on the heads of their inhabitants more cruel than slaughtering? And aren't the cluster bombs and the seven ton bombs and the depleted uranium bombs crueler than slaughtering? And isn't killing by torture crueler than slaughtering? And isn't violating the honor of men and women more painful and more destructive than slaughtering?

All of these questions and more might be asked, and you are justified. However this does not change the reality at all, which is that the general opinion of our supporters does not comprehend that, and that this general opinion falls under a campaign by the malicious, perfidious, and fallacious campaign by the deceptive and fabricated media. And we would spare the people from the effect of questions about the usefulness of our actions in the hearts and minds of the general opinion that is essentially sympathetic to us.¹³⁴

Zawahiri displays an excellent understanding that producing such scenes robs jihadis of sympathy and support from the Muslim population. His judgment is that it is better to restrict violence in order to build support rather than satisfy Zarqawi's bloodlust. Ending his reprimand, Zawahiri closes, "We don't need this."¹³⁵ Atiyah's letter confirms and echoes many of the themes in Zawahiri's letter. He says, "It is a genuine letter and it represents the thoughts of the brothers, the shaykhs, and all of the intellectual and moral leadership here."¹³⁶

Zawahiri's efforts to end the videotaped slaughter of Westerners in Iraq are absolutely crucial in establishing the full measure of constraint that al-Qaeda operates under. It is one thing to limit violence towards their co-religionists. By acknowledging that gruesome attacks on Westerners erodes the support of Muslims, Zawahiri implicitly admits that there are limits to what al-Qaeda can do

¹³⁴ Zawahiri, letter to Zarqawi.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ 'Atiyah, letter to Zarqawi.

to Westerners while retaining any hope of support. He feels that beheadings are not equivalent to what the West has done to Muslims, yet still he is obliged to put an end to them. If Zawahiri believes he cannot allow this type of violence, would he allow the use of WMD against civilians? Zawahiri's current assessment of Muslim sentiment indicates that he feels that al-Qaeda must be very careful about the types of violence it carries out.

C. EVIDENCE OF INTENT TO USE WMD

Based on the statements of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda's reported attempts to acquire WMD, many would argue that the decision to use WMD has already been made, regardless of constituent sentiment. A careful look reveals this assertion to be overstated at best. In addition to the 2003 fatwa issued by Sheikh al-Fahd authorizing (not directing) use of WMD, two statements are cited as evidence of intent. In a 1999 ABC news interview, bin Laden said:

To seek to possess the weapons that could counter those of the infidels is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then this is an obligation I carried out and I thank God for enabling us to do that. And if I seek to acquire these weapons I am carrying out a duty. It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims. But how we could use these weapons if we possess them is up to us.¹³⁷

Bin Laden added to his thoughts on WMD in a newspaper interview shortly after September 11, stating, "I want to make it clear that if the United States uses chemical or nuclear weapons against us, we will not perish."¹³⁸ These statements, taken with al-Qaeda's reported efforts to acquire WMD capability, have been conflated with the intent to use WMD. No where does bin Laden state in an unqualified manner that he intends to use WMD against the West; his statements rely on possessing WMD as a deterrent. Gerges shows

137 Bin Laden, *What Does Al-Qaeda Want*, 41.

138 *Messages to the World*, edited by Bruce Hoffman, translated by James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), 142; The translation of this particular statement is in question. *What Does Al-Qaeda Want*, p. 41, uses the original translation provided by the Pakistan English language paper, *Dawn*: "I wish to declare that if America used chemical weapons or nuclear weapons against us, then we may retort with chemical and nuclear weapons. We have the weapons as a deterrent." Hoffman and Howarth are critical of this translation as apocryphal. See *Messages to the World*, footnote 5, p. 142. In either case, no threat of first use of WMD is made.

that the decision to use WMD is anything but complete; even the hawks within al-Qaeda sought WMD as a deterrent, not a weapon whose employment would achieve their goals:

The hawks argued that obtaining WMD would serve as a deterrent to America's overwhelming power, a balancing act in the military struggle against the United States; in contrast, the doves advocated placing limits on how jihadis wage the struggle and confining local conflicts to their geographical borders and settings. The doves, Abu al-Walid writes, opposed the expansion of the struggle lest jihadis lose international sympathy and invite brutal military retaliation; as to WMD, the doves warned that jihadis were in no position to match the destructive power of the U.S. nuclear armada.¹³⁹

Gerges goes on to reveal that the debate was "theoretical because...Al Qaeda did not possess the means, materials, capability, or know-how."¹⁴⁰ In fact, bin Laden's statements were for propaganda. He "publicly boasted about al Qaeda's WMD potential and made it seem that the organization was on the verge of a breakthrough."¹⁴¹ The senior al Qaeda member that Gerges cites claims bin Laden talked about WMD for propaganda purposes, not because he had and intended to use the weapons.¹⁴² Though al Qaeda publicly threatens the use of WMD, the evidence shows that the statements were more propaganda than substance.

Adam Dolnik agrees with the idea that bin Laden's statements are designed for their propaganda effects:

Even though bin Laden does not strive for political power, he does have a constituency. The use of WMD would generate bad press even in the Muslim world and bin Laden knows this. His ambiguous answers about possession of WMD are also consistent

139 Gerges, 196.

140 Ibid., 196-197.

141 Ibid., 197.

142 Ibid., 196.

with this explanation. On one hand he likes the idea of generating fear among the American public while on the other hand he tries to avoid bad press.¹⁴³

What about al-Qaeda's attempts to acquire WMD capabilities? Al-Qaeda's efforts to acquire this capability reportedly go back to the early 1990s. They include:

- Efforts to obtain fissile material from Europe and South Africa for construction of a nuclear weapon
- Attempts to purchase nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, and the Ukraine
- Allegations that bin Laden successfully obtained "suitcase bombs" through Chechnya
- Purchase of anthrax from an East Asian country
- Purchase of botulism toxin from a lab in the Czech Republic
- Development of unspecified chemical weapons capabilities¹⁴⁴

The uncritical assertion that al-Qaeda's attempts to acquire WMD equal intent to use misses the mark: they are not the same. This interpretation makes sense in view of bin Laden's statements that WMDs are to be used as a deterrent. There are no promises to use the weapons once they are acquired; in fact, bin Laden is rather coy when discussing any capability al-Qaeda might have.

If al-Qaeda has a WMD capability as many authorities claim, why have they not used it? Conversely, if they intend to use WMD, why have they not achieved at least a demonstrative capability given their substantial pre-September 11 resources? The rudimentary attempts to gain WMD capability should not be taken as intent by al Qaeda leadership to plan and execute a bona fide large scale WMD attack. If anything, the failure of al-Qaeda to use WMD is

¹⁴³ Adam Dolnik, "America's Worst Nightmare? Osama bin Laden and Weapons of Mass Destruction," unpublished abridged article, PIR Center, September 12, 2001, <http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/resources/America's%20Worst%20Nightmare%20-%20Osama%20bin%20Laden%20and%20Weapons%20of%20Mass%20Destruction.pdf>. (accessed October 2006).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

an indicator that constituency constraint is occurring; if al-Qaeda felt they could conduct a WMD attack without negative repercussions in the Muslim world, their attempts should have resulted in some kind of demonstrated capability. This distinction may not be comforting; al-Qaeda's possession of WMD for any reason, including deterrence, could have dire consequences. But the distinction between propaganda, attempts at acquisition, and intent to use WMD are important: they are not the same. Even bin Laden's rhetoric avoids expressing any unqualified intent to use WMD because he fears constituent response.

D. CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the final piece of evidence supporting the claim that al-Qaeda is subject to constituency constraint. The previous two chapters provided the necessary conditions. First, al-Qaeda's strategy is dependent upon gaining support of the ummah. Second, this support is in serious doubt. While Muslims may share al-Qaeda's hatred of the United States, the majority of jihadis, fundamentalist, and Muslims in general do not support the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

Al-Qaeda has shown itself to be aware of this negative sentiment, willing to be pragmatic to achieve their goals, and have attempted to restrain violence against Western civilians because of these negative reactions. It has also been demonstrated that al-Qaeda's rhetoric about and attempted acquisition of WMD capability is not the same as the intent to use these weapons. In fact, the evidence examined in this case reinforces the view that al-Qaeda has not made the decision to employ WMD.

Does the constraint demonstrated in this chapter translate into constraints on WMD use? If the constraint shown in this chapter is logically extended, the answer must be yes.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. INTRODUCTION

Suggesting that al-Qaeda would consciously choose not to use WMD against America is a contrarian thought. The popular depiction of al-Qaeda is that of an apocalyptic group of Islamic zealots bent on destroying Americans and their way of life. Al-Qaeda's statements about WMD and reported attempts to acquire this capability amplify this feeling to the extent that most politicians and many academics accept this characterization without question. This generalized notion of al-Qaeda leads to an unstudied assumption that al-Qaeda, aside from technical hurdles, is free of any constraints on using WMD in the United States. This assumption ignores evidence indicating traditional constituent constraints on violence are present.

This chapter will summarize the findings from chapter II-V, place these within al-Qaeda's larger strategic decision making framework, and identify associated policy implications.

B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Al-Qaeda's Search for Public Support

Al-Qaeda actively seeks the support of a Muslim constituency, without which jihadis do not believe they can succeed. Gaining popular support is the central theme to al-Qaeda's strategy, which it hopes will offset their relative military weakness. This strategy is based on a study of past failures – Algeria, Egypt, and Syria – where militant jihadis were crushed by “apostate” governments because jihadis lost or never gained support of the local population. This intellectual basis of the quest for popular support is important in two respects. First, it is rooted in an empirical examination by jihadis themselves, rather than an experimental theory that may simply be discarded when they see fit. Second, it offers no other path to success other than through popular support. In order for jihadis to turn away from this strategy a substantial revision of their underlying intellectual thought must take place. Al-Qaeda is ideologically locked into the attempt to gain public support. This analysis is based upon the most

contemporary jihadi strategy documents, as well as communications directly from the senior most al-Qaeda leadership. Based on this examination, al-Qaeda is likely to actively seek the support of a Muslim constituency for the foreseeable future.

2. Rejection of Al-Qaeda's Violence

The high level of anger towards the United States is worrisome, and Muslims may identify with al-Qaeda's grievances. However, this does not necessarily mean that a majority of Muslims endorse indiscriminate violence against civilians. Al-Qaeda's justifications run counter to Islamic tradition, and its violence transgresses traditional conceptions of defensive jihad. Jihadi and fundamentalist groups, al-Qaeda's most likely allies in Western eyes, have rejected al-Qaeda's legitimacy and fear that massive violence against the West will allow governments to crush all fundamentalist movements seen as a threat, not just al-Qaeda. Simply put, al-Qaeda does not enjoy the support of the majority of fundamentalist organizations.

Likewise, Muslims in general have not granted al-Qaeda the support it desires, but this fact seems lost on many Westerners. Instead of hearing expressions of disapproval of extremist violence from the Muslim world, the West concentrates on the accompanying criticism of United States' foreign policy. It is difficult for the West to get beyond accusations placing the blame for September 11 and jihadi violence on the United States. The West has not looked past what the media depicts. Amaney Jamal, an assistant professor and Muslim public opinion specialist at Princeton University, explains the problem in an interview with Pew's Mark O'Keefe:

Look at the last year of news coverage coming out of the Middle East. Who has been covered in the Western media? Hamas spokespeople, the Iranian president; Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri and that little video of Abu Musab al Zarqawi when he was killed. What other speakers or images from the Muslim world have we seen? Have we seen intellectuals? Have we seen researchers? Have we seen thinkers? Have we seen ordinary people on the street? As you point out, and as the data point out, support for bin Laden is falling in the Muslim world. Yet it is almost as if the Western media has still "elected" him as an evil icon. In

the Arab Muslim world, where we tend to see the highest levels of anti-Westernism, bin Laden has never really enjoyed solid support. Yet he has become an icon to the West, and that is a great concern. It affects and angers Muslims, and it also frightens Westerners. It reifies the divisions.¹⁴⁵

Even Pew and Zogby, perhaps the most well regarded international polling institutions, fail to ask questions that examine important distinctions in Muslim opinion. The analysis of this data in chapter III reveals some important discrepancies in conventional wisdom. First, the high levels of dislike for the United States do not necessarily translate into widespread acceptance of frequent suicide attacks against civilians. A logical conclusion to this finding is that the majority of Muslims would not support a WMD attack against the United States; the corresponding loss of support would be a critical blow to al-Qaeda. Second, though bin Laden enjoys the confidence from a sizeable minority, this may be based more on disbelief in Arab involvement in September 11 and generalized anger at the West rather than an endorsement of bin Laden's methods. Neither of these two findings should bring much comfort to the United States, but they paint a more detailed picture of Muslim opinion: there is not widespread support for indiscriminate killing. Gilles Kepel agrees:

Beyond the circle of Bin Laden and Zawahiri and their supporters and admirers, however, the majority of Islamists and salafists, let alone most of the world's Muslims, no longer see the commando action carried out by the "*umma's blessed vanguard*" against the twin towers and the Pentagon as fulfilling the promise of jihad. On the contrary, after the first few seconds of enthusiasm for this blow to America's "arrogance," most Muslims saw the massacre of innocents on September 11 as opening the door to disorder and devastation within the house of Islam.¹⁴⁶

3. Violence Constrained

Terrorists will not be constrained, even if they do seek approval of a constituency, if they do not believe in conducting violence in a pragmatic manner.

¹⁴⁵ Amaney Jamal, interviewed by Mark O'Keefe, "Islam and the West: How Great a Divide," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, July 10, 2006. <http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=123>. (October 2006).

¹⁴⁶ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 290.

Al-Qaeda strategists have been very clear in this regard: pragmatism is required to gain the support of the Muslim masses. Al-Qaeda is very concerned that their violence does not turn away potential supporters, and they are willing to constrain their actions to this end. This train of thought is evident in jihadi strategic writings and the recent al-Qaeda correspondence to Zarqawi. They view violence as meaningless on a strategic level unless it brings them closer to their goals. To this end, evidence suggests that al-Qaeda is growing more aware that their indiscriminate targeting of civilians is not being tolerated by the majority of Muslims. This awareness has translated into attempts by senior al-Qaeda leaders to reign in Zarqawi. They view Zarqawi's savage attacks as counterproductive to the effort to win public support, and thus counterproductive to achieving their objectives. Would the horrors surrounding a WMD attack be any more palatable to the masses? A large scale WMD attack on a United States city would be inconsistent with al-Qaeda's strategy and counterproductive in building Muslim support.

C. CONSTITUENT CONSTRAINT IN THE BIGGER PICTURE

To be sure, the effect of a particular act of terrorism on a constituency is not the only factor in deciding to commit violence. Martha Crenshaw identified many other costs and benefits that groups consider before resorting to terrorism.¹⁴⁷ Since al-Qaeda has shown itself to be pragmatic and desires to control violence to achieve its ends, it could be expected to engage in reasonably rational decision making that takes into account these costs and benefits. If al-Qaeda considered conducting a large scale WMD attack within the United States, would there be sufficient benefits to offset the costs? In light of the unique status of a WMD attack and al-Qaeda's emphasis on winning popular support, even the traditional benefits of terrorism would likely be lost:

- Agenda settings: Al-Qaeda had already successfully accomplished this function with September 11. With world attention now focused on the United States' debacle in Iraq, and the growing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, a WMD attack would merely refocus

¹⁴⁷ Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer (Connecticut: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003), 59-62.

world attention on the importance of eradicating militant jihadis – a situation decidedly disadvantageous to the current one.

- Undermining the government and demoralizing population: The wholesale destruction of an entire American city would not cripple the U.S. government's ability to respond. U.S. power is simply too widespread to be crippled in any single attack. The U.S. population may be shocked that such an attack could occur, but politicians have been warning of the possibility for years. It is more likely that the response would resemble that after the September 11 attacks, when the country drew together in the face of its modern Pearl Harbor. Such an attack would also reinvigorate the American public which has grown tired of the Iraq war.
- Inspiring resistance by example: Catastrophic WMD use within the United States does not satisfy commonly held conceptions of a defensive jihad. The September 11 attacks did not cause Muslim populations to rise up - it is more likely Muslims would recoil at such an attack. However, al-Qaeda would benefit from demonstrating the capability to conduct such an attack.
- Provoking repression: A WMD attack would certainly provoke the United States into sweeping military action; but in the face of such an attack, this action would come with a heaping dose of legitimacy. In fact, such an attack would be decidedly counter-productive in this respect: it would restore the sympathy and legitimacy granted to the United States post-September 11 but has since squandered.

Aside from proving their ability to do so, al-Qaeda would not accrue many benefits from such an attack. A common theme in this evaluation is that the current domestic and international political situation is more favorable now than could be expected after a WMD attack. The war weariness of the American public and the United States' low political standing are to al-Qaeda's advantage; a WMD attack stands a good chance of reversing this situation. In addition to these negligible benefits, a WMD attack would also impose serious costs:

- Government retribution: The government reaction to a WMD attack would be massive, not only by the United States, but governments worldwide. The United States would be able to mobilize domestic and international opinion for massive action against any groups associated with militant jihadists. Once a terrorist group crosses the WMD threshold in a catastrophic manner, America would enjoy an even greater freedom of action granted it after the September 11 attacks.

- Loss of popular support: Fellow jihadi and fundamentalist groups have already turned against al-Qaeda. In the aftermath of a WMD attack, these same groups would either turn further away or be crushed by the international response. The Muslim masses, who largely do not sanction indiscriminate killing, would either condemn al-Qaeda or continue to believe in conspiracy theories. Based on reaction to the September 11 attacks, there is no reason to expect a WMD attack would prompt a general Muslim uprising.

From a cost and benefit standpoint a WMD attack would produce negative results. Al-Qaeda cannot count on either fundamentalist or Muslims in general to rise up because the majority do not sanction indiscriminate violence.

Could al-Qaeda miscalculate Muslim response to a WMD attack? September 11 was the result of al-Qaeda's failure to understand "not just America's military response...but also the mood and response of the ummah. The ummah may empathize with Al Qaeda's grievances against the international order, particularly Western powers, but it is unwilling to go to war to rectify injustice."¹⁴⁸ Al-Qaeda miscalculated reaction to September 11; they cannot ignore that "the uprising of the faithful that was expected to seize power and reverse the decline of Islamist political movements in the 1990s did not materialize."¹⁴⁹ Prior to September 11, al-Qaeda expected Muslim anger towards the West to translate into overwhelming support for their attack on America; it did not occur. Crenshaw states that "organizations learn from their mistakes and from those of others...Future choices are modified by the consequences of present actions."¹⁵⁰ There is no basis for al-Qaeda to believe a WMD attack would result in a general Muslim uprising or outpouring of support. Al-Qaeda could expect a further turning away by the Muslim masses and a further marginalization in the fundamentalist world.

Returning to the hypothesis, is al-Qaeda is constrained from using WMD because they fear losing popular support? Currently, the weight of evidence supports this hypothesis, but it is far from an assured outcome. As long as

¹⁴⁸ Gerges, 233.

¹⁴⁹ Kepel, *War for Muslim Minds*, 290.

¹⁵⁰ Crenshaw, 63.

United States' foreign policy continues to create widespread animosity in the Muslim world, the possibility exists that al-Qaeda will choose to harness it for its own purposes.

D. PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

Does Muslim public opinion matter? If the United States is genuinely worried about al-Qaeda attacking with WMD, then the answer must be yes. Muslim public opinion plays a central role in constraining al-Qaeda's violence. This thesis assesses current Muslim sentiments as sufficient to constrain al-Qaeda from conducting a WMD attack, but there are no future guarantees. Unfortunately, not only does America face an uphill battle in turning around Muslim opinion, it must first acknowledge that it matters at all:

Historically, the opinions and views of non-elites living in Muslim countries has been of minimal concern to U.S. policymakers. Because of the autocratic nature of many Muslim governments (most are either traditional monarchies or single-party states) and the lack of democratic institutions, many U.S. policymakers and Middle East strategists have dismissed mass opinion as unimportant....¹⁵¹

In light of the environment that negative public opinion creates, this attitude should be discarded. As long as the U.S continues to accrue tremendous ill-will among Muslims, there will be space for violent jihadis to operate in. As Telhami details below, Muslim anger is the only reason al-Qaeda appears to enjoy some support:

I think a lot of people have misunderstood this rise of frustration with the United States as being an endorsement of al-Qaeda's agenda in the region. They have used all of these seeming trends – the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in the Palestinian areas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and so forth – as examples of this rising tide that endorses a pan-Islamic agenda. The evidence is not there. On the contrary, al-Qaeda has not been able to win hearts and minds. Most people have not endorsed its agenda. In fact, when asked what aspect of al-Qaeda do you sympathize with most, only 6 percent say they sympathize with their advocacy of a puritanical Islamic state. Only 7 percent say

¹⁵¹ Erik C. Nisbet, Matthew C. Nisbet, Dietram A. Scheufele, and James E. Shanahan, "Public Diplomacy, Television News, and Muslim Opinion," *Harvard Journal of Press and Politics* 9, no 2 (Spring 2004): 13.

they sympathize with their methods. A plurality say they like the fact that they are standing up to the United States. This is a negative, not a positive. If you look at these other Islamic groups and also at the positions of the public on social issues, you find that they are rejecting the agenda advocated by al-Qaeda, but they win by default because of anger toward the United States.¹⁵²

More dangerous than this shared anger is the possibility that Muslim disapproval for indiscriminate attacks against civilians will erode. Just as prohibitions against killing civilians has eroded in the case of attacks against Israelis, the longer this negative sentiment remains, the more likely it is that Muslims will accept al-Qaeda's justifications and acquiesce to the slaughter of innocents.¹⁵³

It is in the United States' national interest to use all possible methods to reduce the risk of a WMD attack. Reducing terrorism and the WMD threat remain key components in the 2006 National Security Strategy, yet the impact of negative Muslim opinion on America's security is ignored. The strategy avoids the hard realities of the Middle East: that as long as Muslim publics remain enraged by American foreign policy, terrorists enjoy a physical and ideological operating environment. Instead of facing the reality of policy failure, the strategy suggests more of the same:

In the short run, the fight involves using military force and other instruments of national power to kill or capture the terrorists, deny them safe haven or control of any nation; prevent them from gaining access to WMD; and cut off their sources of support. In the long run, winning the war on terror means winning the battle of ideas, for it is ideas that can turn the disenchanted into murderers willing to kill innocent victims.¹⁵⁴

Unless the roots of Muslim anger are addressed, the short term strategy cannot hope to deny terrorist a sense of support from a population that shares its

¹⁵² Shibley Telhami, Brian Katulis, and Jon B. Alterman, "Middle Eastern Views of the United States: What Do the Trends Indicate?" edited transcript, Middle Eastern Policy Council Symposium, July 20, 2006.

¹⁵³ Noah Feldman, "Islam, Terror, and the Second Nuclear Age," *The New York Times Magazine* (29 October, 2006): 53-54.

¹⁵⁴ *National Security Strategy of the United States 2006*, Office of the White House, March 2006. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf>. (accessed October 2006).

hatred of the West. In the long term, the strategy hopes to supplant extremism with democracy – a proposition that has proven to be problematic at best.¹⁵⁵ Thus the short term strategy that ignores reality is apt to become strategy in perpetuity.

Ignoring Muslim public sentiment does not serve the objective of reducing terrorist attacks in general, and WMD attacks in particular. If the United States is unwilling to use all the tools available to reduce the risk, it must ask itself just how serious it is about preventing a WMD attack. In so far as reducing Muslim anger is inseparable from changes to U.S. foreign policy, does the United States find such benefit with current Middle East policies that it is willing to endure the risks of an enraged Muslim population?

¹⁵⁵ *National Security Strategy of the United States 2006*, 10-11.

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